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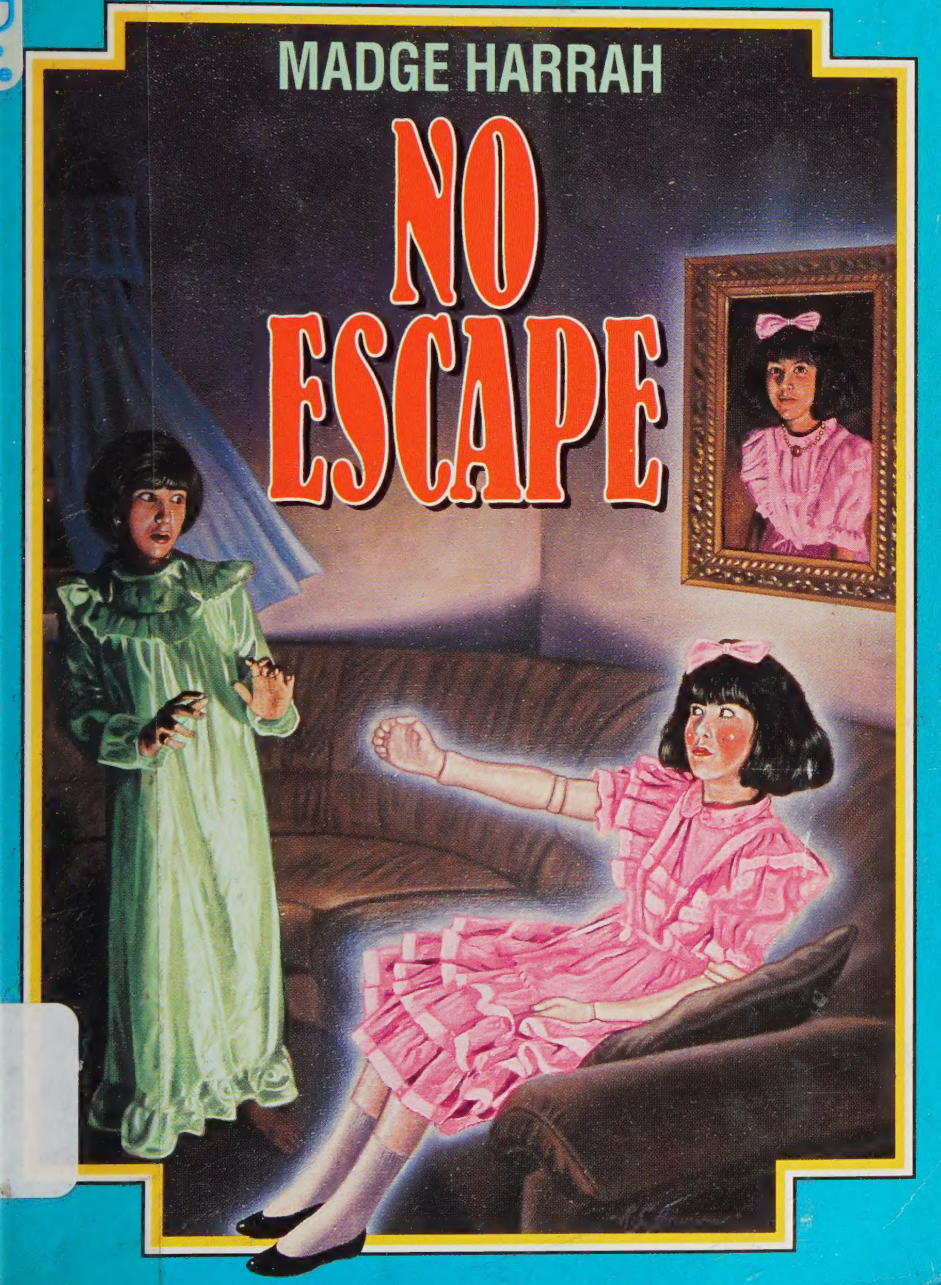

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MADGE HARRAH is the author of three books for young people including the award-winning *Honey Girl* which was named the Best Juvenile Western novel by the Western Writers of America. She lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

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MADGE HARRAH

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AVON BOOKS
A division of
The Hearst Corporation
1350 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10019

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Published by arrangement with the author
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 92-97440
ISBN: 0-380-76569-1
RL: 5.5

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First Avon Camelot Printing: June 1993

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Printed in the U.S.A.

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To Nikki, Kristen, Cody, and Cheyanne

Let . . . the night find thee everywhere at home.
—HENRY DAVID THOREAU, *Walden*

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Chapter 1

I hadn't thought our troubles could get any worse that awful summer, but they did. They got worse when we moved into the haunted house. When Mom headed the car up the hill that hot day in July and I saw the house for the first time, my mouth went dry and my heart began to pound. The house was made of rough rock and looked like a castle built by a crazy witch. It even had a tower like a castle.

"Is that it?" I leaned forward to peer through the windshield of our old beat-up car. "That's where we're going to live?"

"Yes, Carole, that's it!" Mom's voice rang with excitement. "That's Tower Hill! Uncle Jake's old house! Now it's our house, too."

"Cool!" Skipper yelled from the backseat.

Skipper is nine, three years younger than I am, and he thinks everything is cool. "Cool" is what he'd said four weeks before when Mom told us that we were going to move from Ohio to New Mexico. But I'd had a bad feeling about the move all along, and now that feeling suddenly got worse.

"Do the vampires stay in that tower or do they come downstairs for supper?" I asked.

Mom laughed. "It may look spooky to you, but it looks beautiful to me. Uncle Jake's going to let us live with him for free until we can get on our feet. No mortgage, no monthly payments. It's like a gift from heaven."

A lump as big as a plum filled my throat. "But it's not home," I whispered.

Home. The small brick house back in Ohio that Mom and Dad had bought right after they got married. The house where I'd lived all my life. The house we might still be living in if Dad hadn't said he didn't want to be married anymore. Now he had divorced us and gone away.

Mom reached over and touched my hand. "I know it's hard," she said quietly. "But we'll be okay, you'll see. Soon this place will seem like home, too."

Never, I thought. But I didn't say it out loud.

"Well, I like it!" Skipper shouted. "Hurry up and park, Mom. Billy Bob! I want to go in and see Billy Bob." He started bouncing up and down in the seat. "Squawk! Billy Bob wants a cracker! Squawk!"

Mom laughed again. "Good old Billy Bob. I had such a good time playing with him when I was little."

I glanced toward her, thinking maybe she was teasing us. "When you were *little?* How old is he, anyway?"

"Well, let's see. Uncle Jake's had him ever

since I can remember. I'm thirty-three, so Billy Bob has to be at least that old, maybe older."

I gasped. "Parrots can't live that long!"

"Sure they can," Mom said. "Parrots can live to be fifty or sixty."

"Cool!" yelled Skipper.

Mom circled up the driveway and parked in front of the house. "Looks just the way I remember it," she said. "You kids go on in and say hello to Uncle Jake. I'll begin unloading the suitcases."

I slung the strap attached to my binoculars over one shoulder, then climbed from the car and started up the steps toward the porch. I carry those binoculars for bird-watching. They aren't very big, but right then they felt as heavy as a brick. The closer I got to the house, the more my feet dragged. Skipper darted past me.

"Hurry up," he called back over his shoulder. "I want to see Billy Bob." He pounced forward and rang the bell. When no one answered, he rattled the doorknob. "Hey, it's unlocked." Pushing open the door, he ran inside, yelling, "Uncle Jake! We're here!"

I crossed the porch and started to follow him inside. Then I stopped. A shiver ran down the back of my neck. My skin prickled; my nose itched. I stared into the dim hallway beyond the door, watching for something. I didn't know what, but something.

"Uncle Jake?" Skipper's voice echoed from inside the house. "Hurry up, Carole, you gotta see this place. It's really cool."

One foot forward. Another foot forward. I

pushed my way through air that seemed as thick as syrup. Finally I stood inside the house. A long shadowy hallway stretched off to either side. That was spooky enough. But what turned my arms to ice was the sight of a large oil painting on the wall in front of me. A painting of a girl about my age. A girl who looked just like me.

Well, maybe not just like me. My short brown hair curled around my ears while her brown hair hung in waves down to her shoulders. I had on blue shorts and a white tee shirt while she wore an old-fashioned pink party dress with puffed sleeves. Around her throat hung a fancy gold necklace with red stones, which didn't look anything like the plain gold chain I owned. Still, her face was oval like mine. And her mouth was wide and tilted up at one corner like mine. And her eyebrows arched like mine. And her eyes. Green. Like mine.

"Mom!" I yelled.

I heard her bumping up the steps behind me with the bags.

"What's the matter?" she called.

I hurried back across the porch and took one of the suitcases from her while asking, "That girl in there? The girl in the painting? Who is that?"

"Oh, that's my cousin Patty," she said. "Uncle Jake's daughter, remember? I told you about her."

"The one you used to come out and spend the summer with when you were young?"

"Uh-huh."

"The one who got killed by lightning?"

"Yes. She was twelve when that happened, just the age you are now. A very sad thing. Patricia Carole, that was her name, but everybody called her Patty. She was more like my sister than my cousin."

"Then that's why you named me—"

"That's right," she interrupted. "That's why I named you Carole."

I followed Mom back into the hallway. Setting down the suitcase, I looked once more at the painting. Patricia Carole. Patty. If Patty was Mom's cousin, then she was my cousin, too. Or second cousin, maybe. That had to be why we looked so much alike.

Hi, Patty, I called to her silently.

Her eyes, glowing sea green in the dim light, stared back at me.

"Aaaaak!" A high-pitched scream shrilled through the house.

I jumped, and my heart began to race.

"Skipper?" I yelled.

"Help me, help me!" cried a voice. A child's voice. It didn't sound like Skipper.

"Help!" the voice cried again, but I couldn't tell what direction it was coming from.

Mom dropped her suitcase on the floor. "You go that way, I'll go this way," she said to me as she ran to the left down the hallway. With my pulse pounding, I took off to the right.

"Skipper, is that you?" I yelled again.

"Help, help!" screamed the voice.

I came to an open doorway and darted into a room that looked like a den. Bookshelves lined

the walls and rugs with geometric Indian designs covered the floor. As I ran through the room, I got the impression of toys scattered everywhere. Dolls, trucks, airplanes, model rockets.

"Help me!" The cries sounded closer.

I dashed from the den into a large, old-fashioned kitchen. Near the refrigerator I saw an open doorway and a flight of steps leading down.

"Help me!" screamed the voice, echoing from below.

"Hang on, I'm coming!" I shouted. Leaping forward, I darted down the stairs.

Chapter 2

The stairs led down into a huge basement. It wasn't dark down there, the way I would have expected. Bright afternoon sunlight slanted in through sliding glass doors over to one side. The doors led out onto a patio. Sitting near the doors was a huge floor-to-ceiling cage with a large gray parrot inside. The feathers on his wings glistened like silver in the sunlight, while the feathers on his tail gleamed a bright red. His knobby gray claws were wrapped around a tree branch that extended toward the center of the cage from one side.

"*Awk!* Help me!" he screamed.

"Look, it's Billy Bob!" shouted Skipper, dancing up and down in front of the cage.

"Whew!" I exclaimed. "I thought somebody was getting killed down here."

I sagged into a beanbag chair, weak with relief.

Mom pounded down the stairs, shouting, "Skipper, are you all right?"

"Mom, it's Billy Bob," I called. "He's the one yelling for help."

"Billy Bob?" Mom burst into laughter as she

reached the foot of the stairs. "You silly parrot, you scared me to death."

Billy Bob opened his black beak. *"Awk!"* he screeched, glaring at her. *"Awk!* Help me!"

A cup of water and a bowl of food were attached to the inside of the cage where Billy Bob could reach them. Both bowls were nearly empty.

"Where's Uncle Jake?" Mom asked, looking around.

"I don't know," I said. "The front door was unlocked, but he doesn't seem to be here."

"That's odd." Mom frowned for a moment. Then she shrugged. "Maybe he ran to the store for something." She walked over and stood before the cage. "Hello, Billy Bob. Do you remember me? Hello."

"Hello," he said. "Hello. *Awk!*"

I got up and hurried over to the cage for a closer look. Billy Bob edged closer, peering back at me. His beady eyes were yellow with black pupils.

"Help me," he said.

"How do parrots learn to talk?" I asked.

"You have to repeat a word over and over," Mom said. "Finally the parrot begins to mimic what you say."

The chill I'd felt earlier washed over me again. "Then who around here has been yelling for help?" I asked.

Mom frowned again and bit her lower lip. "That's a good question. I didn't even think of that. Who *has* been yelling for help?"

"I asked you first," I said.

The light dimmed inside the room, and I decided that a cloud must have passed over the sun outside. The sudden gloom inside the room made me shiver even more.

"I don't like this," I said. "Why would Billy Bob ask for help? And where's Uncle Jake?"

"Look," said Skipper, pointing toward one wall. "There's a TV over there. Billy Bob's probably been listening to cop shows."

Mom laughed. "You're right, Skipper, that has to be the answer."

Was it the answer? Somehow I wasn't sure.

"Come on, kids, you might as well see the rest of the house." As Mom led the way back upstairs, she added, "This place is laid out in kind of a strange way. Because it sprawls all over the hilltop, it's built on different levels. When Patty and I were little, we had a good time playing hide-and-seek in this house."

When we got back to the kitchen, Mom did not lead us into the den. Instead, she went through a different door, and we followed her into a big dining room that had a long wooden table with heavy carved legs and six tall wooden chairs. Over the table hung a round chandelier of pierced tin, decorated with tin flowers painted in bright colors. Against one wall sat a cupboard carved in a pattern of birds and leaves.

"This furniture is from Mexico," Mom told us. "I'll take you there on a trip someday. Now, through that door is the sun porch—" She was interrupted by the shrill ring of a telephone, com-

ing from the kitchen behind us. "Oh, good, maybe that's Uncle Jake," she said. "You kids go on and explore on your own." She turned and hurried back into the kitchen.

Skipper and I walked out onto the sun porch. It was a long glassed-in room that faced toward a line of tree-covered mountains, which Mom had said were called the Sandias. She'd explained that Albuquerque, where Uncle Jake worked, was about twenty miles away on the other side of those mountains.

"Wow!" Skipper cried, pointing toward the view. "That's—"

"Cool?" I interrupted, finishing it for him.

"Yeah," he said. "And would you look at all these toys!"

He ran over and knelt before a model of a rocket launch site. When he pressed a button on the launchpad, the rocket hissed, lifted off, banged against the ceiling, and fell back with a clatter onto the polished wooden floor.

"Maybe I'd better play with this outside," he said.

"Yeah, maybe you'd better," I said.

He slid over to a tractor trailer truck and pushed down a lever on the cab. The motor whirred, the headlights came on, and the truck took off, winding its way through the legs of the wicker chairs without hitting anything. I crouched down to watch it more closely.

"How does it do that?" I asked.

"Must have some kind of sensor in the headlights," Skipper said. "I've seen stuff like that on

TV, haven't you? You know, those funny little robots that look like bugs and run around without bumping into things?"

"Yeah, I guess so." I sat back on my heels. "Remember what Mom said? That Uncle Jake designs toys for a big toy company? Maybe he designed these."

The truck continued to buzz around the room while Skipper scrambled over to sit before a model of a three-story parking garage. He pushed a button on a control panel. A car purred to life and moved down the ramp. He pushed another button. The lights went on inside a glass elevator. With a click and a whir, the elevator rose toward the top of the garage.

"So, are you coming?" I asked.

Skipper shook his head. "Nah, I'm gonna stay here and play."

"Okay." I rose and slipped my binoculars from my shoulder. I placed them on a table, then walked through another door into the living room. "Oh!"

Eyes. Dozens of eyes, watching me. Blue eyes, green eyes, brown eyes, black eyes. Dolls' eyes. There were big dolls, little dolls, old-fashioned dolls, modern dolls. They sat on the couches, sprawled in the chairs, and stood on either side of the fireplace and in all the corners. I saw a boy doll that was as big as a two-year-old child. He sat on a bench in front of a huge electric organ. A real organ, for grown-ups, like an organ you might see playing by itself in a scary movie. The organ had two keyboards, one above the

other, and was carved in swirly designs that were painted white and gold.

"Too much," I said.

It really gave me a creepy feeling, that organ and all those eyes. I tiptoed into the room, looking back and forth, back and forth, trying to keep all those dolls in sight. Maybe I expected one of them to move, I don't know. I did know I wanted to get out of that room as fast as possible. I hurried through, dodging all kinds of tables, chairs, and lamps. Now I knew why Mom had left our own stuff in storage, back in Ohio. There wouldn't have been room if she'd brought it here.

I came out into a long hallway that angled off with several rooms on either side. A girl about my own size stood in the open doorway of the nearest room. She had shoulder-length wavy brown hair and was wearing a pink dress with puffed sleeves.

Patty.

My breath froze in my throat.

The ghost of Patty.

I couldn't move. I couldn't yell. I just stood there, stuck to the floor. My heart hammered so hard against my rib cage that I thought it would explode.

Patty didn't move, either. She stared straight ahead, her hands held out stiffly in front of her.

A doll?

I took a deep breath. The roaring in my ears quieted to a hum. Then I laughed. Just another doll! But, boy, had she scared me! I stepped for-

ward and touched her hand. Sure enough, it was cold and slick. Plastic.

I grabbed the hand and pumped it up and down. "Hello, Patty!"

She turned her head and looked me straight in the eyes.

"Help me," she whispered.

Chapter 3

I screamed and ran back down that hallway and around a corner to find myself once more in the front hallway. Another ghost moved toward me, a boy this time. Before I could stop, I slammed right into him. When he grabbed my shoulders, I screamed again and covered my face with my hands.

"Hey, what's the matter with you?" he asked.

That didn't sound like a ghost's voice. I peeked between my fingers. Two gray eyes, shadowed by several locks of blond hair, stared back at me from a lean, tanned face. The hands that held my shoulders felt warm.

"Are you okay?" he asked again.

As he let go of me, I lowered my hands from my face.

"I thought you were a ghost," I said.

He grinned. "No, I'm Tim from down the hill. Tim Parker. Sorry I scared you."

"But there is a ghost here." I pointed toward Patty's portrait with a shaking finger. "Her ghost. She's back around the corner."

Now he laughed. "You must have run into Perky Patty. She's just a doll."

"But she spoke to me!"

"Did you shake her hand first?" he asked.

"Yes."

He nodded. "You shake her left hand, she talks. You shake her right hand, she walks."

I took a step backward so I could see him better. He was just a little taller than I was, maybe an inch, and he had on faded cutoffs and an old yellow tee shirt. There were beat-up sneakers on his feet. No socks. His legs and arms, like his face, were tanned a deep brown.

"I help take care of Billy Bob," he went on. "You left the front door open so I just walked in. Are you Carole?"

I stared at him in surprise. "How did you know?"

"Jake—"

"My mom's uncle," I put in.

He nodded. "He talks a lot about your mom, how she used to come and visit Patty when they were kids. And he talks about you and Skipper, too. He's really looking forward to having all of you live with him."

"I only met him once, back when I was little," I said. "I don't remember him very well."

Tim grinned. "Jake's a great old guy. He's—well, he's kind of like a granddad to me. So where is he—out in the kitchen?"

"He's not here."

"What do you mean, he's not here?"

"Just that. When we arrived a while ago, the front door was unlocked, but he wasn't here."

"That's strange." Tim stood for a moment with

his brows pulled together. Then he said, "Maybe he's just out running some errands. Come on. Let me show you how Perky Patty works."

We walked back down the hallway together. When we rounded the corner, I saw that the doll still stood in the doorway where I had left her. Tim stepped forward and shook her left hand.

Her head turned and her mouth opened. "Hi, I'm Patty. I want to be your friend," she said in a flat, mechanical voice.

Tim shook that hand again.

"Come and walk with me," she said.

Tim now shook her right hand, then moved out of the way. She took one step forward, then another, then another. When she reached the wall on the other side of the hallway, she paused. A little whirring sound came from deep inside her. Slowly she turned and headed away from us down the corridor, moving with jerky steps.

"I saw a toy truck do that a while ago, out on the sun porch," I said. "Skipper says it's got a built-in sensor that helps it move around anything that gets in its way. Does the doll work like that, too?"

Tim nodded. "Jake told me how he designed that doll for his daughter for her twelfth birthday. The toy company he works for then made about a million copies of her, only a whole lot smaller than this one. Jake told me just about every little girl in America got a Perky Patty for Christmas that year."

I stood watching the way the doll's ruffled skirt fluttered around her knees as she walked. She

reached the end of the hallway, paused, turned to one side, paused again, then turned toward us and started back. As she got closer, her eyes seemed to look straight at me. I shivered again. I couldn't help it.

"She's kind of creepy," I said.

"Yeah, she is," Tim agreed. "But you get used to her after a while."

When she walked up to us, Tim reached out and pushed her right arm straight down by her side. She stopped moving and stood there, her green eyes fixed and staring into mine.

Mom came around the corner. "Carole, did you yell a minute ago?"

"Yeah, but I'm okay," I told her. "Mom, this is Tim Parker. I thought he was a ghost."

"Well, Tim, you're obviously not a ghost," Mom said with a smile in her voice.

"He helps take care of Billy Bob," I said. "He lives down the hill."

Mom stepped forward and held out her hand. "I'm Barbara Benson, and I'm pleased to meet you, Tim."

As Tim shook her hand, he asked, "Is Billy Bob okay today?"

"He keeps yelling for someone to help him," I said. "Why does he do that?"

Tim looked surprised. "I've never heard him say anything like that."

I jerked my head toward Perky Patty. "That's what she just said to me, too. She said, 'Help me.' "

Tim threw me a puzzled look. "She couldn't have said that."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because she's got a tape loop inside with only ten speeches that just repeat over and over. I've heard every one of those speeches about a million times. She says, 'I like to help my papa.' But she doesn't say, 'Help me.' "

"Well, she just did."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure I'm sure." I began to feel a little angry. Was he calling me a liar? "Something weird is going on here."

"Something weird *is* going on," Mom said. "That phone call just now—it was someone from the toy company. Uncle Jake was supposed to phone the office early this morning to discuss some important business, but he never called."

Tim's eyebrows pulled together in a worried look. "Where do you suppose he is? Could he have been in an accident?"

"Maybe she knows something and wants us to help," I said, pointing toward Perky Patty.

"Come on, Carole, don't joke around. What if—?" Mom paused and bit her lip. "Tim, what if you're right? What kind of car does Uncle Jake drive?"

"A blue van."

"Where does he usually park it?"

"Around back, near the garage."

"Okay, let's go see if the van is there. If it isn't, and if Uncle Jake doesn't show up pretty soon—well, then we may have to call the hospitals just to make sure he's okay."

She headed off down the hallway toward the kitchen with Tim hurrying after her. I started to follow, but glanced back over my shoulder for one last look at Perky Patty. Without being touched, she turned toward me and held out her hand.

"Help me," she whispered.

Chapter 4

I ran down the hallway, yelling, "Mom, she said 'Help me' again!"

Mom and Tim both stopped and glanced toward me.

"She moved on her own, and she talked, too!" I cried. "I didn't touch her, I swear it."

Mom's face knotted into a puzzled frown. "Carole, you must be mistaken."

"No, it's true! Come and look. Please!"

Mom gave her head an impatient shake, but she did turn and hurry back down the hallway while Tim and I followed. Patty stood staring straight ahead with both arms down at her sides. Tim stepped forward and shook her left hand. There was a click and a whir.

"Let's play hide-and-seek. I bet you can't find me," she said in a voice that again sounded mechanical, not natural the way it had sounded when she'd spoken to me.

Tim shook her hand again.

"Billy Bob's a naughty bird," she said, still using that flat, tinny voice.

As Tim kept shaking her hand, her mouth con-

tinued to open and close. She said, "I like to help my papa. Please play a song for me. Will you take my picture? Stop, be careful! Hi, I'm Patty. I want to be your friend. Come and walk with me."

Tim stopped shaking her hand. "See, she's starting over. Ten speeches. That's all she says."

"Now she sounds like a robot," I said, "but a while ago she whispered."

Mom gave me a hard look. "Honey, stop making up all this stuff. I'm worried enough as it is."

"But, Mom, she did say 'help me'! And she moved her head and hands without being touched, she really did."

"Maybe something's gone wrong with her works on the inside," Tim said. "Like the way a computer goes haywire sometimes."

I still found it hard to breathe. "But—" I began weakly.

Mom shook her head at me. "Forget the doll. We've got to look for Uncle Jake."

This time I kept close behind Mom and Tim as they hurried back down the hallway. The spot between my shoulder blades prickled, as though the doll had turned and was watching me, but I didn't look back. The prickling quit when we left the hallway and walked through the den into the kitchen.

Skipper darted into the kitchen with a model airplane in his hands. "Look at this old biplane," he began and then stopped when he saw that Mom and I weren't alone.

"This is Tim, and he helps take care of Billy

Bob, and Uncle Jake is missing, and maybe he's hurt," I said in a rush.

"Gosh!" Skipper gasped, his eyes growing large.

"*Awk!*" screamed Billy Bob from below. "Help me! Hidden treasure! Play a song!"

Tim's eyes widened. "That crazy bird's never said stuff like that before."

We hurried out of the kitchen door and down the back steps. The double garage, separate from the house, sat off to one side. Parked in front of the garage was a blue van with all its windows open.

"Wherever Jake is, he didn't drive," Tim said.

I got an awful picture in my mind of Uncle Jake lying hurt somewhere and calling for help.

"Mom, you said this house is big and sprawls all over the place," I said. "Maybe Uncle Jake has fallen down in one of the rooms and can't move."

Mom nodded, her face tight with worry. "You kids search the house while I search around out here. Could be he tripped over a rock and broke a leg, or something."

She headed for the garage, shouting, "Uncle Jake? Can you hear me?"

Skipper and Tim and I rushed back into the house. We started in the basement and worked our way up, looking in every room and closet. Along with the living room, den, kitchen, dining room, and sun porch, we searched seven bedrooms and four bathrooms. We had to climb up or down steps to get to some of the rooms. There were so many different corridors, with nooks and

crannies tucked into the corners, that I began to feel a little lost.

"We'd better search the tower," Tim said at last.

"Where the vampires live?" I asked.

Tim threw me a crooked grin. "No vampires, just an office with a bunch of computers and stuff. That's where Jake works out the plans for his new toys."

He opened a door at the end of one of the hallways and I saw a flight of steps leading up. Although the steps were enclosed, they looked odd somehow, as if they weren't actually a part of the house. That's when I realized that the tower, like the garage, had been built separate from the house. The steps angled up the hillside through an old breezeway that had been enclosed to keep out the wind. There were several windows set into the walls. While we climbed the steps, I glanced through the windows toward the rugged mountains that rimmed the horizon.

"This is like something out of a movie," I said.

"Yeah, a horror movie!" Skipper agreed, sounding pleased. He darted up the steps and pushed open the tower door. "Oh no!"

My heart turned over like a flipped pancake. I leapt forward, taking two steps at a time, with Tim pounding right behind me. We rushed after Skipper into the room.

"Sheez!" I said, skidding to a halt.

Papers spilled like snow from drawers that had been pulled out of desks and cabinets and dumped all over the floor. Three different computers sat

on a long table in the middle of the room, along with printers and some other stuff I couldn't identify. One of the computers had been left on, and its screen, a big green eye, blinked at us sleepily.

"Kidnapped," Skipper said. "I'll bet Uncle Jake has been kidnapped by burglars."

I shuffled through the mess on the floor for a closer look at the words on the computer screen.

"Don't touch anything," Tim warned. "The sheriff may want to dust for fingerprints."

"I just want to see what this says," I told him.

I think I expected to see the words "*help me*" on that screen. Instead, I saw "*Hidden Treasure*" typed at the top of the screen, followed by several notes:

Parrot
Secret drawer
Jewels
Play a song

"Come and look at this!" I called.

Tim hurried over and read what was on the screen.

"Hidden treasure? Jewels? Secret drawer? What does that mean?" he asked.

I bit my lower lip, trying to think. Someone had recently mentioned hidden treasure. Who was it?

"Billy Bob!" Skipper shouted, as though reading my mind. "Remember? A while ago he said, 'Hidden treasure. Play a song.' "

"That's right!" Tim exclaimed.

"So maybe there's a hidden treasure in this house." I looked around at the destroyed room. "Or was," I added.

"Hidden treasure," Skipper repeated, hopping up and down. "The burglars were looking for it, and Uncle Jake walked in on them, and they grabbed him!"

Goose bumps dotted my arms.

"What's up there?" I asked, pointing toward a circular metal staircase.

"An extra bedroom," Tim said. "Jake's got a cot up there for nights when he works late and decides just to sleep in the tower."

I headed for the stairs at once, and the others followed. The stairs circled up through the floor to the room above. That room had windows all around, like a room at the top of a lighthouse. I blinked my eyes against the dazzle of sunlight that bounced off the dresser mirror and the frame of the metal cot. The mattress lay on the floor, its cover slashed, its stuffing spilling out in big gray clumps.

"Who did this?" Tim demanded behind me. His voice shook with anger.

"I don't know, but we'd better tell Mom."

I scrambled back down the stairs and ran from the tower and down the steps to the house below. As I sprinted through the hallways, I yelled, "Mom! The house has been robbed!"

I passed Perky Patty and saw her turn her head and lift one hand as I dashed by. Her voice echoed after me, stronger than before, but this time the words in her plea had changed.

"Help my papa!" she called.

Chapter 5

Mom called the sheriff's office. Within ten minutes Sheriff Emilio Sanchez arrived. A tall dark-haired man in a tan uniform, he told us he'd known Uncle Jake for years. Mom told him what had happened and led him to the tower. When he saw the shambles there, he took a radio from his belt and called for additional help.

After the investigators had checked all around the house—and, yes, they dusted for fingerprints—Sheriif Sanchez said to Mom, "Looks like an attempted burglary, all right, although we won't know for sure what's missing until we've talked to Jake. Those computers, for instance. Why would burglars leave those behind?"

"Maybe Uncle Jake interrupted the burglars and scared them off," Mom said.

Sanchez nodded. "Maybe."

Mom's face pulled into an anxious frown. "But in that case, where is Uncle Jake? Do you think they may have hurt him?"

"We've found no evidence that anyone was hurt. Don't get too alarmed, not yet." Sanchez glanced toward Skipper and me. I could tell he

was trying to keep from frightening us. Nevertheless, I saw his own face tighten in a worried look as he turned back to Mom. "I do need to warn you that we've got a jewel thief on the loose around here. This break-in maybe connected with that."

"A jewel thief!" I cried. "Did you notice? On the computer in the office. It says 'hidden treasure,' and it says 'jewels.' "

He nodded, glancing toward me again. "I did notice. What do you think it means?"

"Maybe it's a clue," I said. "Maybe there is hidden treasure here."

He looked once more at Mom. "Did Jake have any valuable jewelry in the house?"

"Well—" Mom paused, her brows drawn together. "Just that ruby necklace, that's all I can think of."

"What ruby necklace?" Skipper and I asked together.

Mom led us all to the front hallway and pointed toward the necklace that Patty was wearing in the portrait. "That one. It's a family heirloom."

I peered more closely at the painting. The red jewels around Patty's neck looked so real they almost seemed to glow. "Where's the necklace now?"

"I don't know," Mom said. "Uncle Jake hasn't mentioned it to me in years."

"But that's it, don't you see?" I insisted. "The burglars were after the necklace, and Uncle Jake walked in on them, and they kidnapped him!"

"Didn't I say he'd been kidnapped?" Skipper demanded. "Didn't I say it first?"

I nodded. "Skipper did say it first, but I'll bet he's right. Uncle Jake is in danger, and that's why Perky Patty is asking for help!"

Sheriff Sanchez had already turned back toward Mom. I could tell he hadn't heard the part about Perky Patty.

"Look, we mustn't jump to conclusions," he said. "I told you I've known old Jake a long time. When he gets to working on a project—well, he's just like the absentminded professor you hear about in jokes. He came into my brother's hardware store the other day, bought a whole mess of wire and stuff, then walked right off and left it all on the counter." He tapped his forehead. "He acts a little loco sometimes—a little crazy."

Mom's forehead crinkled in another frown. "You think he might have forgotten we were coming today and gone for a walk or something?"

"Could be. People sometimes do things like that when they've got a lot on their minds. Try not to worry, okay? I promise you, we'll check every lead. Let us know the minute you hear from him, and we'll do the same."

After he and his investigators had left, Mom sighed. "Maybe he's right. Maybe Uncle Jake will be back soon."

"No, he's really in trouble!" I cried. "That's why Perky Patty said—"

Mom whirled around, interrupting me. "Carole, I'm tired of hearing about that doll. Please, don't talk about her anymore."

But I had to try one more time. Turning urgently to Tim and Skipper, I asked, "But you heard her, didn't you? You heard her say, 'Help my papa.' "

They both shook their heads.

"But you must have!" I insisted. "You were both right behind me when we ran down out of the tower."

"I didn't hear anything," Skipper said.

Tim gave me a sympathetic look. "Sorry, Carole, but I didn't, either."

Mom stepped forward and touched my forehead. "Honey, are you running a fever? Fever sometimes makes a person imagine—"

I pulled away from her. "I'm not sick and I'm not imagining this! That doll really did ask for help. You know what I think? I don't think it's the doll at all. I think it's Patty, the ghost of Patty, talking through the doll."

"Oh, sweetheart." Mom really looked alarmed now. "It's been a long hard day. I think maybe you'd better go lie down."

I turned from Mom to Skipper to Tim, and I saw the same kind of wary look on each of their faces. That's when it hit me. They thought *I* was the crazy one! *Loco,* that's what the sheriff had called it.

"I'm not crazy, I'm not. She really did talk to me," I protested.

But my voice wavered. Could they be right? Could I have imagined that the doll asked for help? Maybe it was all Billy Bob's fault. Maybe

after he said, "Help me," I got it stuck in my mind and thought the doll had said it, too.

"Come on, I'll show you your room," Mom said. "It's Patty's old room, the room we shared together whenever I came out to visit."

If Patty's ghost were haunting this house, then her old room would be the place she'd most likely hang out. I opened my mouth to say no, I didn't want that room, but Mom had already hurried away. I followed her through the dining room and that spooky living room, back out into the hallway where Perky Patty still stood, stiff and straight, staring straight ahead. As I edged past her I willed her to speak so that Mom could hear, but she just stood there with her mouth shut.

Mom led the way toward the end of the hall and stopped before a closed door to her right. She opened the door and stood to one side so that I could enter first. Once inside the room, I stopped, sweeping my gaze from one side to the other.

"Wow!" I exclaimed.

Against one wall sat a white four-poster bed, which was covered by a pink silk spread and canopy. A large framed poster of a hummingbird hung nearby. Sitting against the opposite wall was a white dresser, and near the dresser hung a poster of a blue bird with a black crest on top of his head. I walked closer and saw a name printed at the bottom of the poster: STELLAR JAY. Turning, I saw another poster of a bird hanging above a desk. That bird had a long tail, a crested head, and long skinny legs. He was leaning for-

ward, his beak pointed straight ahead, as if he might take off running at any moment.

Mom said, "That's a roadrunner, New Mexico's state bird."

I moved over to the desk and picked up a black leather binoculars' case that was lying near several books on bird-watching. One in particular struck my eye: *Birds of New Mexico.*

"Patty must have been a bird-watcher, too!" I exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, she was," Mom said. "She really loved birds."

I opened the case and took out the binoculars. I saw at once that they were an expensive pair, much better than my binoculars, which were still on the sun porch.

Mom came to stand beside me. She picked up a small notebook, just big enough to fit in a pocket. "Here's her logbook. She always carried this with her whenever we went on walks."

I laid down the binoculars and took the logbook, flipping through the pages to the last notation, which was dated more than twenty years ago. It read: *Stellar jay. Piñons near tower.*

Mom had already pointed out piñon trees to Skipper and me during the last part of our drive out here. She had said some people in New Mexico used them for Christmas trees, but they looked too sprawly and bushy to me, not triangular and pointed like our Christmas trees back home. I put down the notebook and picked up the binoculars again, then hurried over and opened a window near the bed, admitting a sweep of dry

wind. The tower rose from the hilltop just above me, dark against the bright blue sky. Sure enough, there was a big clump of piñon trees nearby. When I focused the binoculars on a rock near the tower, I found I could see every detail, even individual shiny grains of mica. The head of a green dragon loomed suddenly before me, its tongue flicking in and out, its beady eyes glinting in the sunlight.

"Oh!" I gasped, lowering the binoculars.

I peered toward the rock with my naked eyes. There was no dragon, just a tiny flicker of movement that raced across the rock and vanished. I laughed, realizing that my dragon was a lizard.

"These are neat!" I said, turning the binoculars over in my hands. "Do you think Uncle Jake will let me use them?"

Even as I said that, reality crashed around me like tumbling bricks. I couldn't ask Uncle Jake. Uncle Jake was missing.

Mom seemed to sense what I was thinking. "Try not to worry too much, sweetheart. Like the sheriff said, Uncle Jake probably just went for a walk." Her attempt at cheerfulness didn't ring true. "Now you rest for a while," she went on. "I'll wake you up in time for supper."

She left the room, closing the door behind her. Since I wasn't a bit tired, I didn't lie down. Instead, I placed the binoculars on the bed and walked over to a door near the desk. When I opened it, I saw a small bathroom tiled in pink. Pink was my favorite color. Maybe it had been Patty's favorite color, too.

There was another door on the other side of the desk. When I opened that one, I found a closet stuffed full of clothes: dresses, blouses, sweaters, slacks, and a shoe rack with sandals, tennis shoes, and a pair of clunky brown leather shoes that looked really out of date. I shoved through the clothes, sliding the hangers along the rod.

"Oh!"

I gasped out loud and jerked my hand away from a pink silk dress with ruffles and puffed sleeves. It looked just like the dress that Patty had worn when her portrait was painted, just like the dress that was on the doll.

"Don't be silly," I scolded myself. "A dress can't hurt you."

I took it out and held it up. Seeing a gray film on the ruffles, I gave the dress a shake. Dust puffed into the air, tickling my nose.

"Achoo!"

Wiping the sneeze away, I moved to stand before a full-length mirror. I lifted the dress and draped it against my body. I saw at once that the dress would fit, and that I would indeed look like Patty if my hair were a little longer. It made me feel really weird. The resemblance between us, the shared interest in bird-watching, that spooky doll, Uncle Jake's disappearance—it was just too strange. I dropped the dress in a heap on the floor.

"I don't like this place. I want to go home!" I cried to my reflection.

My room back in Ohio had not been as big as this one, but it had been *mine,* with my bed, my

dresser, my desk, my posters, and a view from my window of a grassy slope and a big old maple tree that flamed scarlet every fall. I wanted that room, I wanted my own things. Most of all, with an ache that filled my whole chest, I wanted my old life, with my mom and dad seated across from each other at the supper table every night.

Why did things have to change? Why couldn't they just stay the same, forever and ever? No place would ever be home to me except our house back in Ohio. No place. Certainly not here.

Feeling really low, I trudged over to Patty's bed, picked up the binoculars, then moved back to the window and looked again toward the tower. This hillside had no grass or maple trees, just piñons, along with prickly cactus poking up through the sand and rocks. As I watched, a large blue bird flickered through the branches of one of the trees and flew to the ground. Maybe it was a stellar jay. I'd never logged a stellar jay!

And then something else moved among the trees, a shadowy shape—the shape of a person—that shifted and then stopped dead still. My heart pounded as I waited for the shape to move again. Was the burglar hiding out there? Was he spying on the house? Had he seen me watching him?

I waited for a long moment, but nothing more happened. I decided maybe I'd imagined it. Or maybe what I'd seen was just another jay. I peered through the binoculars toward the trees. No, there it was again, a flash of movement, a glimpse of color that looked like a blue shirt. Someone *was* watching the house!

I heard a scratching sound on the other side of my door, as though someone were sliding fingernails back and forth over the wood. *Mom hasn't given me very long to nap,* I thought. Still, I was glad she had come back. Flinging the binoculars onto the bed once more, I darted across the room.

"Mom!" I called. "There's someone watching us from those trees outside."

I flung open the door and found myself face-to-face with Perky Patty. She extended stiff plastic fingers toward my face and took a step forward.

"Help my papa," she said.

I backed into the room, keeping my eyes on her. She took another step forward. I couldn't stand it. If she touched me, I thought I'd die.

"Help my papa," she said again.

I had to get away from her. Whirling, I rushed for the window. I pushed out the screen, slid over the sill, and dropped to the ground, falling forward with a jarring thud onto my hands and knees. As I scrambled back up, I glanced over my shoulder and saw Perky Patty now standing by the window.

"Help my papa!" she cried.

I couldn't run toward the trees—*he* was there. I couldn't go back to my room—*she* was there. Turning, I ran up the hill toward the tower.

Chapter 6

I pounded up the hill, praying to reach the tower before Perky Patty or the stranger caught me. There was a door just ahead of me. If I could reach that door—

But I was still about ten feet away from that door when it slowly began to open.

"Oh no!"

I stumbled to a halt. What if one of the burglars was opening the door? What if the person hidden in the trees was his accomplice, keeping a lookout?

Then the door opened all the way, and Tim stepped out, followed by Skipper.

"Wow, am I glad to see you two!" I called as they hurried to join me.

"What's the matter?" Skipper asked. "You're as pale as a ghost."

I didn't like his choice of words. "Maybe ghosts aren't pale," I said. "Maybe ghosts look like real people."

"Or dolls?" Tim asked. There was a touch of mockery in his voice.

"Maybe," I said, glancing back toward the

house. The curtains at my window stirred in the breeze, but Perky Patty was gone.

"You're weird," Skipper said. "You're really freaking out."

"You'd freak out, too, if that doll spoke to you! You'd yell for help like anything! They'd hear you clear back in Ohio!"

"Oh yeah?" Skipper rotated one finger near the side of his head to show he thought I was crazy.

I stamped one foot. "I am not crazy, and I am not imagining things."

"Then there has to be a logical explanation for that doll," Tim said. "Maybe someone has reprogrammed her messages."

"Or maybe it really is Patty's ghost, and maybe she really is asking for help," I said defiantly.

Tim gave me a pitying look. "I don't believe stuff like that. If I did, my grandma would pop me right into therapy."

Therapy? Great. He *did* think I was crazy.

"So why should your grandmother have any say about it?" I asked.

"Because she's a psychologist who works with kids," Tim explained. "I'm staying with her this summer while my folks are out of town."

Oh, wonderful, a child psychologist right down the hill. I could just picture my mom going to her and saying, "My daughter is hearing strange voices . . ."

"So, what were you doing in the tower?" I asked, deciding I'd better change the subject fast.

"Looking for clues," Skipper said. "Something the sheriff might have missed."

"Did you find anything?"

"No."

I pointed toward the piñons. "Someone was over there in those trees a while ago, watching the house."

"Well, come on!" Tim said, heading at once in that direction.

My pulse skittered. What if the person was still there? What if he kidnaps *us?*

When we reached the trees, Tim asked, "Just where did you see this person?"

"Right through there," I said, pointing. "Behind that big tree with those smaller trees on either side."

Tim plunged at once into the green shadows. "Here are some tracks!" he yelled.

I hurried to stand beside him. Sure enough, there in the sand and pine needles were some scuffed tracks. I knelt to examine the clearest track more closely and saw that it was divided into two parts, a small square heel and a long smooth sole with a pointed toe.

"Look!" I cried. "This track was made by a woman wearing high-heeled shoes."

"No, that's the print of a cowboy boot," Tim told me. "And it could have been made by either a man or a woman. A lot of people wear cowboy boots out here."

"But it is a clue," Skipper insisted.

Tim didn't look convinced. "Maybe, maybe not. We don't know that this person is the burglar."

"But we do know that someone was standing here watching the house." Placing my hands on

my hips, I stared at them both defiantly. "And we do know that I didn't imagine this! Here's the proof."

Tim nodded his head. "You're right. You didn't imagine it."

"Whoever it was can't be very far away," I went on, "because I saw him—"

"Or her," Tim interrupted.

"Anyway, I saw him or her just five minutes ago."

"Let's go look out on the road," Tim said.

We plunged on through the trees and came out near the road that curved down the hill past Uncle Jake's house. We looked around in all directions, but saw no one in a blue shirt and cowboy boots.

"Whoever it was must have taken off fast," I said.

"Carole? Carole!"

Mom's voice, calling me. I turned and saw that she had come out on the front porch and was looking frantically all around. Then she spotted me and hurried down the steps.

"Carole, what happened?" she asked as she drew nearer. "I went to your room a while ago to see if you were okay, but you'd disappeared and your screen was pushed out."

Did I dare tell her about Perky Patty? With the way everyone seemed to think I'd gone crazy—

"Mom, when you were in my room, did you see—well, was Perky Patty there?"

Sure enough, Mom got that look on her face that said, just as clearly as though she'd spoken the words, *Oh no, here we go again!*

"Look, before you say anything, listen to me!" I cried, feeling really desperate now. "I don't know what's going on, but that doll walked into my room a while ago, and she said, 'Help my papa,' just like she said before. She's Patty, Mom. The ghost of Patty is in that doll! I'm scared, and I need you to believe me!"

Mom stared at me for a long moment, her face pulled tight. Then she walked over and wrapped her arms around me, hugging me close while talking in a soothing voice.

"Carole, honey, it's okay. Don't worry, everything's going to be all right."

That should have made me feel better, but it didn't. I could tell she still didn't believe me.

"Tim's grandma is a child psychologist," Skipper volunteered. "Maybe Carole needs to talk to her."

"I am not crazy!" I protested, pulling away from Mom to give Skipper a dirty look.

"No, of course not," Mom said, still using that quiet voice. "Come in the house now, and I'll make you all a nice glass of iced tea."

"There was someone up on the hill a while ago watching the house," I said, refusing to be stopped. "Someone in a blue shirt and cowboy boots."

Mom glanced toward Tim and Skipper. "Did you see this person?"

She just might as well have asked straight out, "Is Carole imagining this, too?"

"Well, we did find some tracks," Tim said.

Mom turned and glanced toward the road just

as a couple of kids rode by on bikes. Neither one of them had on blue shirts or cowboy boots.

"The person I saw was a grown-up," I said. "Maybe a man, maybe a woman. When I climbed out the window, whoever it was must have taken off."

"Why in the world would you climb out the window?" Mom asked.

"Because Perky Patty was after me! She walked into my room, and she held her hands out like this—" I extended my hands and made my fingers into claws "—and she asked for help!"

Mom gave me a level look. "I'm the one who used to know Patty," she said, still speaking quietly. "If her ghost wanted to get in touch with someone, why wouldn't she contact me instead of you?"

I'd wondered about that, too. I chewed my lower lip, thinking about it.

"Maybe it's because I'm her age," I said at last, "and maybe it's because I look like her, and I'm a bird-watcher, too. And maybe she knows you wouldn't believe her. You'd argue it all away, just like you're doing now."

Mom sighed. "I just don't know what's the matter with you. Come on in the house now."

She led the way back through the front door. I glanced up and down the front hall, looking for Perky Patty, but she wasn't in sight.

When we arrived back in the kitchen, Tim said, "I'd better call my grandma and let her know what's going on." He did, and then said, as he hung up the phone, "She'll be right up."

Oh great, I thought, the child psychologist.

I knew what she'd look like. She'd be one of those tall thin women with dyed hair and thick goop on her face to cover the wrinkles. She'd wear a tailored suit and high heels and thick glasses with dark rims. And she'd carry a notebook and a pen. And Mom would tell her about me, and she'd look at me over the top of those glasses, and she'd say, "So, you think you're hearing voices, do you?"

By the time the doorbell rang, I'd worked myself into a fizz. Tim hurried toward the front hallway and I followed, deciding I might as well meet his grandmother at once and get it over with.

As Tim opened the door and stepped to one side, he said, "Hi, Grandma, come on in. This is Carole."

The woman who entered was short, fat, and gray haired. She wore a red sweat suit and pink sneakers. No makeup. No glasses. Lots of wrinkles.

"Hi, Carole," she said, grinning at me. "I'm Randi Parker."

I grinned back. I couldn't help it. She looked really friendly, just like a plain old grandmother, not my idea of a psychologist at all.

"Hello, Mrs. Parker," said Mom from behind me. "I'm Barbara Benson. Come on into the living room and we'll—"

Mrs. Parker glanced down the hallway with a frown while shaking her head. "Do you mind if we talk in the kitchen? Those dolls in the living room give me the creeps."

Soon we were seated around the kitchen table.

Mom put on a pot of coffee and then told Mrs. Parker all about Uncle Jake.

"Sheriff Sanchez thinks he just wandered off and forgot to come home," she ended.

"No way!" Mrs. Parker said. "Jacob may be absentminded, but he's not senile. He knew you were coming today, and he told me he planned to be here to meet you."

Mom's face tightened. "Sanchez said there's been a thief around here lately. Mentioned something about jewelry being stolen."

Mrs. Parker nodded. "And Jacob's got that ruby necklace hidden somewhere in this house. I told him he should put it in a safe deposit box, but he said he'd hidden it where no one could find it.

"Hidden treasure, play a song," I murmured.

Mrs. Parker glanced toward me. "What did you say?"

"That's what Billy Bob keeps saying," Skipper put in. "He says, 'Hidden treasure, play a song,' and he says, 'Help me.' And Carole thinks the doll is saying—"

I kicked him under the table.

"Ouch!" he yelled. "Why'd you do that?"

"What doll?" Mrs. Parker asked.

Tim threw me a quick look. "Perky Patty. You know how it is, Grandma." He shrugged, acting casual about the whole thing. "Carole heard her talk a while ago and it scared her."

Mrs. Parker reached out and patted my hand. "That doll scares me, too. First time I ever heard her talk, she just about gave me a heart attack."

"But Carole thinks—" Skipper began.

"Grandma, what do you think could have happened to Jake?" Tim interrupted quickly. Again he flashed me a quick glance, and I realized he was trying to help me by getting Skipper off the subject of Perky Patty. It gave me a warm feeling, as though Tim might really be my friend.

"Well, he might have fallen down a cliff and broken his leg," Mrs. Parker said.

Mom twisted her fingers together, the way she does when she's really worried. "The children searched the house and I searched the yard, but we didn't look beyond that."

"There are several trails around here where Jacob likes to hike," Mrs. Parker said. "Tim, you've hiked with him, you know where he likes to go."

"Yes—" Tim began.

"Then we've got to search some more!" I cried, jumping to my feet. "I'll get my binoculars."

I hurried to the sun porch and slung my binoculars from their strap over one shoulder. I returned to the kitchen just in time to hear Mom say, "Watch out for rattlesnakes."

She'd been lecturing Skipper and me about rattlesnakes ever since she'd told us we were moving to New Mexico.

"And here, take my watch," she added, removing her watch from her wrist and handing it to me. "Don't be gone longer than an hour. I couldn't stand it if you got lost, too."

"Okay, Mom." I slipped the watch over my own

wrist, glad to get out of this house even for just a short time.

"What do you think, Grandma?" Tim asked. "Do you think we should search Dead Man's Canyon first?"

Dead Man's Canyon? What an awful name. Why would Uncle Jake choose to hike in a place like that?

"Okay," Mrs. Parker said. "You kids search Dead Man's Canyon, and I'll head down the valley in the other direction." To Mom she said, "Maybe you'd better stay here to answer the phone in case the sheriff calls."

Mom nodded.

A wave of homesickness washed over me as I again remembered our home back in Ohio where I'd always felt so safe. But it was too late. That house was sold, and here we were in New Mexico, surrounded by ghosts, jewel thieves, rattlesnakes, and canyons named after dead people.

With my binoculars banging against my back, I hurried out the door after Skipper and Tim.

Chapter 7

Tim set off across the backyard past the garage. Although Mom had already looked in there, I veered in that direction to look once more.

"What a mess!" I exclaimed.

There were metal scraps and chunks of wood scattered over the floor. Different kinds of tools lay on the tops of several workbenches or hung from a large pegboard on one wall.

"Jake builds the models for some of his toys in there," Tim called back over one shoulder.

I couldn't see all the details of the room in such a quick glance, but I did make sure of the most important fact: Uncle Jake was not lying injured on the floor among the wood shavings.

Tim led the way along a path that circled around the side of the hill and down a slope to a deep gully. The walls on both sides of the gully were layered with red and tan rock, dropping steeply down to a streambed carpeted with sand that flowed around several scattered boulders.

"Is this it? Is this Dead Man's Canyon?" I asked. I'd expected something bigger, more like the Grand Canyon, which I'd seen pictured in a book.

"Yeah, this is it," Tim said. "It's just an arroyo, really, but it's kind of fun to climb around in."

"Back home we'd call this a ditch," I said.

Tim threw me a sharp look. "Back home, meaning Ohio?"

"That's right," I said, returning his look. "Back home, meaning Ohio."

"Carole doesn't like it here," Skipper put in, "but I do. I just hope we can find Uncle Jake."

That pulled me back to the present in a hurry.

"You're right, Skipper. The important thing right now is to find Uncle Jake," I agreed.

"He likes to walk along this trail whenever he's thinking up a new idea for a toy or a game," Tim said.

He headed off along the edge of the ditch.

Or arroyo, I corrected myself.

As we rounded a bend, the gravel on the path slid under my shoes, and I reached out and grabbed hold of Skipper to keep from falling.

"Hey!" Skipper yelled.

"Be careful," Tim warned at the same time. "The arroyo's not very deep here, but you could still get hurt if you fell down those rocks."

Was that what had happened to Uncle Jake? Still holding on to Skipper, I peered down into the arroyo. That's when I noticed footprints along the edge of the sandy streambed.

"Look," I said, "someone's been walking around down there. Do you think it could have been Uncle Jake?"

"We'd better go down and have a look," Tim

replied. "But your mom's right, watch out for snakes."

He scrambled down a section of rocky wall that was stepped like a staircase, and Skipper and I followed. Every time I reached out to grab hold of a rock, I looked first to make sure a rattlesnake wasn't coiled there, ready to sink its fangs into my hand. By the time we reached the sandy floor, I was breathing hard. Tim had already knelt to examine the prints, and Skipper and I joined him. Most of the prints were scuffed, but a couple clearly showed the imprint of a square heel and a long, smooth, pointed sole.

"Cowboy boots again!" I cried. "Maybe this is the person who was watching Uncle Jake's house a while ago."

"Like I said, just about everybody around here wears cowboy boots," Tim reminded me.

We rose and slogged along the sandy streambed, following the prints. When we rounded another bend, I stopped and grabbed Tim's arm.

"Look!" I whispered.

Coming toward us down the arroyo was a tall, skinny man wearing a faded blue denim shirt, blue jeans, blue trucker's cap, and cowboy boots. Because of his dark beard it was hard to tell how old he was, but I decided he might be around my mom's age. He was carrying a shovel over one shoulder.

"Blue jeans, blue shirt—" I began, but Tim shook his head interrupting me.

"Can't be the burglar," he said. "That's Fenton Hawk, the guy who does all the odd jobs around

here, like yard work and hauling trash and stuff like that. Everybody knows Fenton."

The man spotted us.

"Hey, Tim!" he called. "Whatcha doin'?"

"Looking for old Jake," Tim called back. "Have you seen him anywhere?"

The man increased his stride. "Nope, I sure ain't. Was just headed toward his house. Goin' to talk to him about doin' some work. Guess this means he ain't home."

"That's right. In fact, he's disappeared," Tim said.

As Fenton strode up to us, I saw on his face, behind all that hair, a look of surprise. "What do you mean, disappeared?"

Tim quickly filled him in on the story, introducing Skipper and me as he went along. Fenton glanced toward Skipper and me and nodded at the introduction, but did not speak until Tim had finished.

Then he said, "So Sanchez thinks old Jake forgot you were coming and went for a walk?"

"That's right, Mr. Hawk," I replied. "That's why we're searching this arroyo."

Fenton grinned down at me, showing a row of stained, uneven teeth. "Just call me Fenton, little lady. Everybody does."

"Okay, Fenton. Anyway, we're looking for my uncle Jake—"

Fenton shook his head. "He ain't here. Ain't nothin' in this arroyo but lizards, snakes, and chipmunks."

I looked at the shovel over Fenton Hawk's shoulder.

"Have you been out rock collecting?" I asked.

He frowned. "What makes you ask that?"

"Well—the shovel . . ."

"Oh, the shovel." The frown left his face and he smiled, a crooked smile that angled off to one side beneath his ragged mustache. "Just thought I'd bring it along in case Jake wanted me to start work this afternoon."

I glanced at the watch on my wrist. It was after four o'clock. That seemed late to be starting a job. I looked at the hills around us and saw, perched near the edge of a bluff just ahead, a log cabin peeking through the piñons.

"Who lives up there?" I asked.

He followed the direction of my gaze. "That's my place."

I lifted the binoculars and peered toward the cabin. One of the shutters hung loose from its hinges. An old pickup truck sat parked to one side near a log shed, and beyond that lay a big pile of junk and trash. Fenton might help other people with their yard work, but he certainly didn't take care of his own place, I thought.

Fenton leapt forward and grabbed the binoculars away from my eyes. "Why are you lookin' at my place?" he demanded.

I yanked back from him, forcing him to let go of the binoculars. "Just looking for birds. That's my hobby."

"Well, I don't like it when folks mess with me or my place, so keep your eyes to yourself, okay?"

I looked down at his boot prints in the sand. They looked exactly the same size as the boot print I'd seen in the sand under the piñon tree.

A terrible thought struck me. Maybe Tim was wrong. Maybe Fenton really was the thief. Even worse, maybe he had killed Uncle Jake and buried him in this arroyo.

Dead Man's Canyon.

"Come on, Skipper. Come on, Tim," I said, trying to keep the fear out of my voice. "If Fenton says Uncle Jake isn't here, then we might as well go back to the house."

I turned and scrambled up the rocky slope to the trail above. Pebbles rolled beneath my shoes and skittered noisily down the bluff.

"Ouch!" cried Skipper, huffing up the rocks behind me.

Only when the three of us reached the trail above did I glance back down toward the canyon bed. Fenton stood motionless, staring up at us, his fist gripped around the handle of the shovel.

"See ya later, Fenton!" Tim called, but Fenton didn't answer.

"Hurry up. Let's get out of here!" I murmured, keeping my voice low.

I fled back down the path and didn't stop until we'd rounded a corner and Fenton was out of sight.

"What's the matter with you?" Skipper demanded when he and Tim caught up with me.

"I'll bet you Fenton's the burglar," I said.

Tim gave me a disgusted look. "I told you, everybody knows Fenton. He's harmless."

"Yeah? Well, he scares me."

"You're scared of everything lately," Skipper said. "First you were scared to move. Then you got scared of a silly old doll. Now you're scared of somebody we just met."

I clenched my hands into fists. "Fenton's footprints are just like that ones we saw behind the tree. And that shovel—"

"What about the shovel?" Tim asked.

"He's buried something in this arroyo," I said.

Skipper's eyes grew as round as an owl's. "Do you think . . . ?"

I nodded. "Could be he's buried the stolen jewels here, could be he's even . . ." I paused and swallowed hard before I could go on. "Maybe he's even buried Uncle Jake."

"Oh!" Skipper gasped.

Tim pulled his brows together, frowning at me. "Can't be Fenton, I tell you. He's worked for everybody around here for years."

"Which gives him a perfect way to—" I paused, searching for a phrase I'd heard recently in an old detective movie on TV. I found it. "To case the joints," I said. "That's how he finds out where people keep their jewels."

"So Fenton was looking for the ruby necklace, and Uncle Jake found him—" Skipper began.

"And that's when Fenton kidnapped him," I said.

Tim shook his head. "I still don't know. But if you're right, and if Jake is still alive—"

"Then he might be tied up in Fenton's cabin!" Skipper exclaimed.

"Right!" I straightened my shoulders. "We've got to rescue him."

"But you're afraid!" Skipper said.

"Yes, I'm afraid," I admitted. "But we've got to save Uncle Jake if we can."

"Come on, then," Tim said. "I think I know how to sneak up on Fenton's place without him seeing us."

He led the way down into the arroyo again and up the other side. Trying to keep to the cover of the bushes and piñons, we headed up the hill toward Fenton's cabin.

Chapter 8

When we reached the top of the hill, we dropped to our knees behind a clump of bushes. Through the leaves I peered toward Fenton's cabin. I held my breath, listening for any sound that might mean Fenton had returned.

Wham!

I grabbed Tim's arm. "What was that?" I whispered.

"Shutter. Banging in the wind. You see him anywhere?"

I looked all around, still keeping my ears open. "No."

"Come on," Skipper muttered. "Let's check it out before he gets back."

We sprinted forward and dropped to the ground beside the cabin, right below one of the windows. I crouched there, breathing hard.

"What if he beat us back and is already inside?" Skipper asked.

"Keep your fingers crossed," I said. I edged up and peeked over the sill.

"See anything?" Tim asked.

I shook my head. "No. He's got a sheet tacked up over the inside of the window."

Tim eased up to stand beside me. "Yeah, you're right. Can't see a thing."

"Let's try the front door," Skipper said. "If Uncle Jake is tied up in there—"

I took a deep breath, trying to slow my racing heart. "You're right. If he's in there, we've got to get him out."

I darted up on the porch and twisted the doorknob. It wouldn't turn.

"Locked."

"Maybe a window's open somewhere," Skipper suggested. "Maybe we could crawl through."

We hurried around the cabin, trying the windows and the back door, but they were all locked. Something rustled in the nearby bushes. I whirled, staring toward the noise, my pulse pounding in my throat. "You hear that?"

Just then a squirrel darted out and scampered up a tree.

Skipper laughed. "Not Fenton Hawk. Fenton Squirrel, that's who you heard."

"Yeah, but the real Fenton could show up any minute." Tim sounded grim. "If Jake's tied up in there, we've got to let him know we're here." He rapped on one of the back windows. "Jake, it's Tim!" he called, not too loudly. "Tim Parker! Can you hear me?"

No answer. I ran to another window.

"Uncle Jake? It's Carole! Are you there?"

Skipper dashed off around the corner of the cabin. I heard him pound on a window there. "Uncle Jake, this is Skipper. Yell if you can."

"Listen!" Tim said.

I listened and heard a muffled growl coming from inside the nearby shed. Alarm iced my skin. "Sounds like a dog, and he sounds mean."

The growling got louder. *Crash! Bang!* Something inside the shed fell over, as though the dog had knocked it down.

"Gosh," I said. "He sounds big."

I got this awful picture in my mind of a huge black dog with red eyes. His lips were curled back in a snarl and foam flowed around his yellow fangs. I picked up a stick and gripped it hard in one hand, ready to fight if the dog burst out of the shed.

Skipper ran back around the cabin. "What's going on?"

"Over there, that shed." Tim pointed. "Maybe that's Jake. Maybe he's gagged and can't answer us. Come on!"

Tim sprinted toward the shed and I followed, still holding the stick in case Tim was wrong.

"Jake? Jake, we're coming!" Tim called.

Crash! Something fell over inside the shed. Was the dog trying to get out?

"Oh no!" I cried, lifting my stick.

"The door's padlocked," Tim pointed out. "Jake, is that you?"

Thump, thump.

Tim leapt forward and tugged at the padlock. When it held fast, he twisted hard, trying to pull it loose from its screws. "No use, it's fastened tight."

"Maybe this one has a window we can crawl through," Skipper suggested.

Together we ran around the shed. We found only one tiny window, high up under the eaves on the back.

Tim groaned. "Too small. Not even Skipper could get through there."

"But if we climbed up there, we might be able to see in," I suggested.

I looked around and spied an old broken ladder lying on the nearby junk pile.

"Over there. Maybe that'll work," I said, pointing toward the ladder.

Tim and Skipper took off at once for the junk pile. They lugged the ladder back to the shed and leaned it against the wall under the window.

"I don't know. It's looks pretty rickety," I said.

Dropping the stick, I grabbed hold of a cracked rung and gave it a tug. The rung broke in two and fell to the ground.

"I'll climb," Skipper said. "I'm the lightest."

I nodded. "Okay, then. We'll hold it, but be careful."

I grabbed the ladder on one side and Tim grabbed it on the other. We each braced one foot against the bottom of the ladder to hold it steady while Skipper began to climb. The splintery wood groaned and creaked under his weight.

He had almost reached the window when a voice roared behind us, "Hey, what do you kids think you're doing?"

I whipped my head around and saw Fenton Hawk standing right behind us with the shovel gripped in his hands like a club. Letting out a yell, I let go of the ladder. So did Tim. The ladder

slid to one side and crashed down, spilling Skipper onto the grass.

"I told you, I don't like people messing around my property!" Fenton shouted.

The noise inside the shed changed to muffled yelps. It sounded as if someone were trying to speak, someone with his mouth tied shut.

"Who's in there?" I demanded.

"It's my new dog, a rottweiler," Fenton replied. "I paid a lot for that dog. If you kids trespass here again and let my dog loose, I'll set the law on you. You got that?"

He lifted the shovel over his head and took a step forward us. Skipper scrambled to his feet.

"Run!" he yelled.

He took off down the hill like a rabbit, and Tim and I scurried after him, crashing through the brush and dodging tree limbs. We didn't stop until we reached the safety of Uncle Jake's back door.

Chapter 9

We burst through the door into the kitchen to find that Tim's grandmother had already returned. She and my mom were sitting together at the table drinking coffee.

"Fenton Hawk's got Uncle Jake tied up in his shed!" Skipper shouted.

"What!" Tim's grandmother slammed down her cup and scraped her chair back from the table, a shocked look on her face. "Jake? Tied up in Fenton's shed?"

"We don't *know* that." Tim looked a little embarrassed. "Carole's got this wild idea—"

"It's not wild," I interrupted, hurt by Tim's reaction. "We met this man in the arroyo, and he was carrying a shovel—"

"It was Fenton," Tim put in.

"And Carole decided maybe he'd buried Uncle Jake, or at least kidnapped him," Skipper continued. "Then we sneaked up to Fenton's place, and something *is* locked in the shed. Fenton came back and said it's a dog—"

"It *could* be a dog," Tim interrupted.

"—and Fenton yelled at us, and told us if we

ever set foot on his land again, he'd tell the sheriff we were trespassing," Skipper finished.

"Oh, Carole." Mom rose to her feet, looking at me reproachfully. "What's gotten into you? You don't even know this man."

"Well, he acted kind of funny." I shuffled my feet. "Why was he carrying that shovel?"

"Fenton works for people around here," Mrs. Parker said quietly. "He digs up shrubs and mows yards and repairs fences and does all kinds of things. He often carries a shovel. Tim knows that."

"I told her," Tim said.

"Thanks a lot," I muttered.

My previous thought that he might become my friend flew right out the window.

"Hidden treasure! Play a song!" yelled Billy Bob from the basement. "Help me, help me!"

His words brought back the picture of Perky Patty walking toward me with jerky steps, begging "Help me." It was just too much.

"I hate this place," I burst out, glaring at Mom. "I hate it because you don't believe me, and I hate that awful doll, and I hate that stupid parrot, and I hate this house!"

Turning, I ran from the kitchen into the den.

"Carole!" Mom yelled after me.

I fled into the hallway and out the front door. Blinking back tears, I jumped down the steps and dashed off down the road, in the opposite direction from Dead Man's Canyon. Even as I ran, I knew I was acting stupid. Where could I go? Not back to Ohio, that was for sure.

"Carole, wait!"

Tim's voice.

I speeded up, not wanting him to catch me. I'm a pretty fast runner, but he proved to be even faster. His footsteps pounded closer.

"Go away!" I yelled over my shoulder.

"Stop, okay? I want to talk to you," he yelled back.

"No!"

I heard his shoes slapping the dust right behind me. Then a hand closed over my arm. I stumbled, trying to jerk away, but he held fast. We swung around in a circle as I fought to get free.

"Carole!" yelled Mom, running down the hill after us.

Right behind her ran Skipper, with Mrs. Parker puffing along after them in her red sweat suit and pink sneakers. I stopped fighting and stood still, staring down at the dusty road. What was the use? They'd just catch up with me sooner or later, anyway.

Mom arrived, breathing hard from the run. "Carole, please. I'm sorry you're so unhappy, but . . . Look, I've asked Mrs. Parker to talk with you—"

Uh-huh, just as I'd suspected. She'd been discussing me with the child psychologist.

Mrs. Parker stepped forward and put her arm around my shoulders. "Moving to a new town is tough," she said. "I hate to move. Always have. Leaving old friends, making new friends. That's

hard. And all this worry over your uncle. No wonder you're upset."

I knew what she was trying to do. She was trying to make me think she was on my side. The weird thing is, it was working. I really did need to talk to someone. Someone who would truly listen.

"There's where Tim and I live," Mrs. Parker went on, pointing toward a brown flat-roofed house that looked as if it were made out of dried mud. Mom had told me that kind of building material was called adobe.

"Come on in," Mrs. Parker continued. "I'll make some sandwiches and we can talk."

Well, why not?

"Tim, you come up and eat with us," Mom said.

I knew what she was doing, too. She was setting it up so Mrs. Parker and I would be alone. Which was fine with me. I certainly didn't want to talk in front of Tim.

Mrs. Parker led the way up a flagstone-paved sidewalk to the front door. The door was made of heavy carved wood and was painted blue. Beside the door hung a long string of wrinkled bananas, only they were bright red instead of yellow.

"Chili peppers," Mrs. Parker said, following my glance. "We grind those up and use them to cook with. Some of them are hot enough to burn your tongue."

Hot or not, they looked pretty, hanging there beside the door. The inside of the house proved to be pretty, too. There were red brick floors with

Indian rugs scattered around, Mexican furniture similar to Uncle Jake's, and low beamed ceilings.

"Come on out to the kitchen," Mrs. Parker said. "You can help me make the sandwiches, and then we'll eat out on the patio."

The kitchen also had a beamed ceiling and was as cool as the inside of a cave. While I sliced tomatoes and spread mayonnaise on pieces of bread, Mrs. Parker bustled about setting out ham, cheese, and potato chips, along with cans of cola. We carried the food outside to a picnic table that was shaded by a trellis covered with vines. Mrs. Parker waited to start talking about anything serious until we'd eaten part of our meal. Then she settled back in her lawn chair and asked, "So, do you want to tell me why you hate this place so much?"

"It's—" I paused, searching for words. "It's just not home."

"Tell me about home."

The memories flickered through my mind like a videotape running on fast forward. "The house—"

"Whose house?"

"Mom's and Dad's and Skipper's and mine."

"Uh-huh." She nodded as if that were important."

"Well . . . I had my own room," I went on, "and I'd fixed it up just the way I wanted it. And school. School there was neat. I was in the bird-watchers' club. Last spring I got elected president for the coming year."

I stopped, remembering all the plans I'd made for the club. Now Annette Buford, the vice presi-

dent, would be taking over in my place, and she didn't know beans about birds.

"Bird-watchers club? Sounds like fun," Mrs. Parker said.

"It was. And now—" Again I stopped.

"And now?" Mrs. Parker prompted.

"Well, it's just not the same," I burst out. "Uncle Jake's house, I mean. It's not home and never will be. Weird things are going on there. Uncle Jake . . . missing. And that awful doll. I hate that doll!"

"Tell me about the doll."

"You won't believe me. You'll think I'm crazy."

"Are you crazy?"

"No!" I clenched both fists on top of the table. "Something strange is happening in that house, something really scary."

"Tell me about it," she repeated.

So I told her. Everything. She kept nodding, her face sympathetic, as though she were really interested in my story.

"Mom's always said there aren't any ghosts, but there's a ghost in that doll," I finished. "The ghost of Patty."

When Mrs. Parker just looked at me for a long moment without saying anything, I felt my hope drain away.

"You don't believe me," I said.

"I believe that you believe it," she replied quietly. "If the ghost is real, then you must find out what she wants. If she isn't real, but just your subconscious making you think she's real, then

you must find out what it is *you* want, what it is you're trying to say to yourself through the doll."

"I already know what the ghost wants," I said. "She wants her father back."

For one moment I couldn't breathe as the realization hit me in the chest like the blow of a fist.

"*I* want my father back," I whispered. Stricken, I looked at Mrs. Parker. "Am I imagining all this because I miss my dad?"

"Could be," she said. "And if that is the answer, it doesn't mean you're crazy. The mind is an amazing thing. It can make up all kinds of ways to help a person get through difficult times."

"But it seems so real," I argued. "When Patty talks to me. And when she walks. By herself, without being touched. She does that, I swear it."

"Do you get the feeling she wants to hurt you?"

I thought about that. "No. She scares me because she's so spooky, but I don't think she'd hurt me."

"Good. Then I want to suggest something. The next time she speaks to you, don't run away. Ask her questions. Maybe—"

"Maybe it'll really be me talking to myself through the doll?" I asked, still startled by such an idea.

"Who knows?" Mrs. Parker shrugged. "But you may learn something that will help you. Meanwhile, please remember, you can come to me whenever you need to talk. Okay?"

I didn't know whether I wanted to talk with her again or not, but I said okay. I rose and

started to gather up the remaining food to carry back into the house.

"No, I'll do that," Mrs. Parker said. "You go on home."

"Home," I murmured.

Mrs. Parker grinned. "Figure of speech. But I want you to think about something. Home is not one particular house that you have to stay tied to all of your life. Home may be a cave or a boat or even a tent, and it may change from day to day. But if you decide a place is home, then it is. You can be at home anywhere if you make up your mind to it."

That was easy for her to say. She hadn't been picked up and moved halfway across the country against her will. Still, I could tell she was trying to be friendly, and I did appreciate it.

"Thank you," I said.

She led me back through the house and waved good-bye at the door. I walked back up the hill thinking about everything she had said. Was it possible that I'd put those words in the doll's mouth? *Disturbed.* That's the word people used for kids like me. I'd heard it on a talk show on TV.

I fell asleep that night in Patty's bed still wondering about it. Was I really disturbed? Was my subconscious inventing all this?

I'm not sure what it was that woke me up. Maybe some kind of noise. I lay with my eyes closed for a moment, still drifting on the edge of a dream. Then I did indeed hear a noise, a soft sliding sound near the bed, like a footstep whis-

pering over the floor. My eyes snapped open and I sat halfway up, clutching the sheet to my chin.

Perky Patty stood near my bed in a shaft of moonlight with Billy Bob on her shoulder. She lifted one hand toward me, a pleading look in her moon-glazed eyes.

"Please," she cried. "Help me. Find my papa."

Chapter 10

Fear. It squeezes the heart and fogs the mind. I slithered backward until my spine pressed against the headboard. Perky Patty's eyes glittered in the moonlight.

"Please. Find my papa," she begged again.

"Find my papa," echoed Billy Bob. *"Awk!"*

I slid my gaze toward Billy Bob. He tilted his head and peered back at me. "Hello," he said.

Then he laughed, an insane screech. The sound chilled me clear through.

"Oh!" I cried, pressing even harder against the headboard.

"Billy Bob's a naughty bird," said Perky Patty.

"Naughty bird. *Awk!*" squawked Billy Bob. He laughed again, cackling like a Halloween witch.

There was no place to go. I was cornered. Something snapped inside me.

"Stop that!" I yelled at Billy Bob.

"Stop that," Billy Bob repeated.

I straightened up, struck by a sudden thought. Weren't animals, including birds, supposed to have some kind of sixth sense about danger? Billy Bob did not seem to be afraid of Perky

Patty. He sat on her shoulder as comfortably as though he were safe inside his cage. Maybe if he wasn't afraid, I didn't have to be afraid, either. Mrs. Parker had told me to talk to Patty. Okay, then, I thought, it's worth a try.

"Pa-Patty?" I stammered.

"I'm Patty," she said.

"Are you really Patty?" I asked.

"I'm Patty," she repeated, nodding her head.

I peered at her through the moonlight. She kept her glittering eyes fixed on mine.

"Are you me, talking to myself?" I asked.

She shook her head from side to side.

"I could be making all this up," I said.

Which was true. It really did seem crazy to be holding a conversation in the middle of the night with a parrot and a doll.

"I could be imagining this. I could be dreaming," I continued.

Patty took a step toward the bed. "I'm Patty. Help me. I want my papa."

But I wanted my father, too. I wanted him to come back and live with us. If this were my subconscious speaking, then maybe my subconscious had a plan.

"How do I do that?" I asked.

"Play a song," she replied.

I scrambled to my knees. "What song?"

"Song," screeched Billy Bob.

I shook my head in frustration. "I don't understand. How will playing a song help me get my father back?"

"My papa," said Patty.

"That's what I said."

"*My* papa. I want *my* papa."

"Is your father's name Robert?" I asked. My father's name was Robert.

She shook her head.

I thought about that. "Is your father's name Jacob? Are you talking about Uncle Jake?"

She nodded.

But I had to make sure. "Are you *really* Patty?"

She nodded so hard that her shoulders jerked, causing Billy Bob to squawk in protest.

"Help me!" she cried.

That was not my subconscious talking. That was Patty. It had to be. But there was something else I needed to know before we went any farther.

"Patty, will you hurt me?"

She shook her head. "Friend. I want to be your friend."

She meant it. I could tell she did. The fear that had fogged my mind evaporated, leaving me strong again. "Okay, then. Friends. How can I help you? What is it you want me to do?"

"Play a song," she repeated.

Play a song. Those words had been on the computer screen in Uncle Jake's office, and Billy Bob had kept saying them, too.

"What song?" I asked.

"My song," she said in a firmer tone, as though I should know what song she meant.

I tried another tack. "Play a song on what?"

"Play," she said insistently.

The only instrument I'd seen in the house was the organ in the living room.

"The organ? You want me to play the organ?" I asked in dismay. I'd had a year of piano lessons, but I'd never made it past the first book in the John Thompson series. "Swans on the Lake" was the only piece I'd ever memorized.

She nodded. "Play a song."

She turned and walked away with Billy Bob still on her shoulder. When I didn't follow, she stopped.

"Come," she said without looking back. "Walk with me."

Billy Bob swiveled his head around and peered at me sideways. "Come!" he commanded.

I slid from the bed and padded after them. Patty moved stiffly out the door and headed down the hallway toward the living room. Because the windowless corridor was so dark, I walked carefully, shuffling my feet and trailing one hand along the wall. The darkness fled when I turned the corner and followed Patty into the living room. The moonlight streaming through the windows made the room almost as bright as day. Patty walked over to the organ bench and swept the boy doll off onto the floor. She glanced toward me while pointing at the keyboard.

"Play a song," she said.

I moved forward and peered closely at the various switches. In the pale light I finally found a switch marked ON/OFF. When I pushed the switch to the ON position, a small circle of red light winked at me while the organ motor began to hum softly. I slid onto the seat and touched one of the keys. Nothing. Patty reached around me

and pushed down several organ stops with her stiff fingers. I touched the key again and jumped as the tone vibrated into the air.

"Play," she said.

Positioning my hands on one of the keyboards, I began playing the first bars of "Swans on the Lake," stumbling along with fingers as stiff as Patty's. I'd never played the piece well, but this was the worst ever. I was about halfway through when the living room lights flared on, drowning out the moon.

"Carole!" Mom cried. "What are you doing?"

My fingers collapsed on the keys, hitting several at once. The chord that split the air sounded like the howl of a dog in pain. Hastily I pulled my hands down into my lap while glancing at my mother. Her tousled hair sprang wildly around her pale face.

"I'm—uh—practicing the organ," I said.

Mom charged across the room, her long blue gown fluttering around her legs.

"In the middle of the night? Why?" she demanded.

I glanced toward Patty. She had frozen into a stiff pose. Her eyes, blank and fixed, stared straight ahead. Anger blazed through me like a bonfire. I scrambled down from the bench and faced Patty, my hands on my hips.

"Stop acting like this!" I demanded. "I know you're in there. I know you can hear me. You tell my mom this was all your idea. You tell her right now."

"Carole!" Mom's voice shook.

I stamped my foot. "Patty, you're really mak-

ing me mad! If you want help so badly, then you'd better speak up."

"Carole, please," Mom begged.

"Listen, Mom, she's just pretending to be a doll," I said. "She came into my room a while ago and she asked me to play this organ."

Mom was breathing hard. "She can't have done that."

"She did do it," I insisted.

"Awk!" said Billy Bob.

"And you got Billy Bob out of his cage, too," Mom said, looking more and more distressed. "Honey, why did you do that?"

"I didn't get Billy Bob out of his cage. *She* did. And she told me to play a song."

"Play a song," screeched Billy Bob.

"See?" I said.

"That's the parrot talking. It's not the doll. It's the parrot." Mom spoke in a slow, careful voice as though I were a child.

"But she said it, too," I insisted.

All of a sudden Mom burst into tears and sank to the floor. "I can't stand it," she moaned, rocking back and forth with her face buried in her hands. "Carole. Oh, sweetheart—"

I knelt beside her. "Mom, I'm okay. Patty has come back, she really has. She's come back because she's so worried about Uncle Jake."

Mom continued to cry. I jumped up and grabbed Patty's hand.

"You see what you've done?" I yelled. "Tell her who you are right now, or I'll rip off your wig!"

There was a little whirring noise. Her mouth

opened. "Let's play hide-and-seek," she said in her flat, mechanical voice.

"Not like that," I shouted, shaking her again. "Talk the way you talk to me."

She whirred again. "I bet you can't find me."

Mom stood up and dashed the tears away from her eyes with the back of her hand.

"We'll get help for you, Carole," she said. "I promise, honey, you'll soon be well again."

I glowered at Perky Patty. "You traitor."

"Help me," squawked Billy Bob.

"And you're just as bad, you birdbrained bunch of feathers," I cried, shaking a finger at him. "I'm through! If the two of you want help, then go ask somebody else."

Mom removed a shawl from a chair and wrapped it around her arm.

"Here, Billy Bob," she coaxed. "Step onto my arm and I'll take you back to your cage."

Slowly, with much clucking and protest, Billy Bob edged onto Mom's arm.

"You stay here," she said to me as she headed toward the kitchen. "I'll be right back."

Soon I heard her tapping down the stairs. Angrily, I turned on Patty.

"Are you satisfied?" I hissed. "Mom will never believe me now."

Patty turned her head and looked me in the eye. "Be careful! Naughty bird," she said in a warning tone.

"Oh, great, now you decide to talk," I snapped, burning with fury. "Besides, you're the one who

got Billy Bob out of his cage, not me. You're the naughty bird."

"Bird. Be careful," she said.

"Oh, yeah? Go tell someone else."

I turned my back on her and picked up the boy doll from the floor. I carried him over to one of the chairs and arranged him carefully against a pillow. Giving him a pat, I asked, "There, are you more comfortable now?"

"Hey, what's going on?"

I jumped, thinking for one brief second that the boy doll had answered me. Then I glanced over my shoulder to see Skipper standing in the doorway. He rubbed at the sleep in his eyes with the backs of his hands.

"You want to know what's going on? Oh, just a little concert," I said with a shrug. "Sorry I woke you up."

"So it was you playing the organ just now?"

"Yes." I didn't explain.

"I dreamed I was in a castle, and I heard an organ playing, and bats were flying all around," he said. "Then I woke up and heard voices yelling—"

"That was Mom. I woke her up, too."

Skipper shook his head. "You're getting too weird."

Mom came back into the living room. Her face drooped in haggard lines, making her look ten years older.

"Carole, would you like to sleep with me the rest of the night?" she asked.

"No, Mom, I'm okay. I really am."

"No more organ playing?"

"Not tonight, I promise."

She sighed. "Okay, then, let's all try to get some sleep."

She started to lead the way from the room.

"Just a minute," I said, "I've got to turn off the organ."

I dashed back and flipped off the switch. As I turned away, I stepped hard on Patty's toe, trying to make her cry out so Mom and Skipper could hear. She just stood there, stiff and unmoving, while staring straight ahead.

"Okay, be like that. See if I care", I hissed.

Striding away from her, I followed Mom and Skipper from the room.

Chapter 11

So what did all this get me? Another session with the child psychologist. Mom called her right after breakfast the next morning. By ten o'clock I was back on Mrs. Parker's patio. This time she was wearing blue jeans and a blue cowboy shirt. And cowboy boots. I kept staring at those boots, trying to figure out if they'd match the prints I'd seen the day before behind the piñons near the tower.

"Tell me what happened last night," she said.

I told her. When I'd finished, she said, "Carole, I'm proud of you."

That was not what I'd expected her to say. "Proud of me? Why?" I asked.

"For not running away. For facing up to your fear."

I shrugged. "It was a funny thing, the way the fear went away. At first, when I woke up and saw Patty standing beside me with Billy Bob on her shoulder, I was scared to death. Then—well, I got mad at Billy Bob for laughing and yelled at him. He just sat there, calm as could be. That's when I realized he wasn't scared of Patty, so I

decided that maybe I didn't have to be scared, either. I started talking to her, and she said she wanted to be friends."

"Remarkable," Mrs. Parker said, gazing at me intently.

"Then she told me to play a song."

"This song. You didn't find out what it was?"

"No, she just told me to play. I don't know why. But I guess it sure scared Mom when she heard that organ."

"And how did you feel about the whole thing?" Mrs. Parker asked.

I frowned, thinking about it. "Patty needs my help, but she's having a hard time talking through the doll. It seems like the only words she can use are the ones already recorded on the tape. She does change the words around, kind of mix and match, but still—"

I hesitated. Mrs. Parker nodded, encouraging me to go on.

"Well, it's hard to figure out what she means. Maybe wherever Patty is now, maybe the people there—or angels or whatever—maybe they don't talk. Maybe they just read each other's thoughts, or something. But I do know she's worried about her father, and she wants me to find him."

Mrs. Parker's face tightened. "I'm really worried about Jacob, too. It's not like him to stay away like this. I just hope he hasn't fallen down a cliff somewhere and really hurt himself."

"The sheriff called this morning to say he's alerted the state police. He said something about

getting out ground teams and civil air patrol planes to start a search."

"Good." She chewed her lower lip for a moment, her eyes bleak and staring over my shoulder. "Jacob's had a hard life, you know, losing Patty when she was little, and then losing his wife a few years later. But he's a brave man, and a strong one. If he has broken his leg, he'll figure out a way to survive until help gets there."

"Mom says Patty was killed by lightning."

"Yes. Billy Bob escaped from his cage, and Patty ran out into a storm, thinking he'd flown outside. She was running up the hill toward the tower when the lightning struck her."

I shuddered. "How awful! I don't see how Uncle Jake could stand it."

"You don't ever get over a loss like that, not completely," Mrs. Parker said gently. "But sometimes the people you love do die, or move away somewhere else. When that happens, you just have to get on with your life as best you can. It's hard, but you can do it."

I looked at her closely. "You're talking about me and my dad."

She leaned across the table and put her hand over mine. "Your mother has told me all about the divorce. Carole, you'll see your father from time to time. But he won't be coming back to live with you."

An ache filled my chest, as if I'd swallowed a big chunk of ice that wouldn't go down. Tears filmed my eyes, blurring my view of Mrs. Par-

ker's face. I tried to speak, but couldn't get out any words.

"Your home in Ohio is sold," Mrs. Parker continued quietly. "This is your home now. The sooner you can accept that—"

"The sooner I'll stop imagining that Patty talks to me?" I asked.

She nodded.

I drew my hand away from her and pressed it against my chest, but the ache remained. I'd never accept this place as home, never. Rebellion uncoiled inside me like a snake. I was not imagining the things about Patty. She had come into my room the night before. She had asked me to play a song.

The session ended, and I marched back up the hill to find Skipper in the basement with Billy Bob.

"Say 'cool,' " Skipper demanded, peering at Billy Bob through the bars of the cage. "Say 'cool.' "

Billy Bob cocked his head to one side and glared at Skipper.

"Come on, Billy Bob," Skipper begged. "Say 'cool.' "

Billy Bob glared.

"Cool, cool, cool," Skipper chanted.

"Play a song," squawked Billy Bob.

Skipper planted his fists on his hips. "Stupid bird."

"Stupid. *Awk!*" Billy Bob glared at Skipper.

Skipper glared back. "Say 'cool.' "

Billy Bob laughed, the cackling laugh from the night before. I had to laugh, too.

Skipper turned toward me, shaking his head. "He sure is stubborn."

"Pretty boy," cackled Billy Bob. "Billy Bob's a pretty boy."

"Billy Bob's a naughty boy," I said, stepping closer to the cage.

"Naughty boy," echoed Billy Boy.

"Say 'cool,' " Skipper said. "Billy Bob, say 'cool.' "

Billy Bob glared.

Skipper sighed. "I give up."

"Skipper, you down there?" Mom yelled from upstairs.

"Yeah, Mom."

Mom came tapping down the stairs. She drew up short when she saw me.

"Oh, you're back," she said.

Questions filled her face. I could read them as clearly as if I heard her speaking: How did it go? Are you okay?

"Yeah, I'm back." I didn't elaborate.

She hesitated, still searching my face. Finally she asked one of the questions out loud. "Well, how did it go?"

"Okay, I guess."

I could tell she wasn't satisfied by that. I got the feeling that she wanted me to spill everything out, tell her what Mrs. Parker and I had said to each other, word for word. But I just wasn't ready. I needed time to think. Besides, I was full of mixed feelings right at that moment,

and one of those feelings was anger at Mom for not believing me about Patty. Maybe she sensed that, for she sighed and changed the subject.

"Look," she said, "I need to go to the store to buy some food, and I wonder if you kids would stay here and—"

"I want to go," interrupted Skipper.

"But someone has to stay here to answer the phone," Mom said.

"I'll stay," I told her.

"You don't mind? You won't be . . ." Again she hesitated.

"Scared? No, I'm not scared of Perky Patty anymore."

Again I could read Mom's face. She thought if I was no longer scared of Perky Patty, then maybe I had quit believing the ghost of Patty was speaking through the doll.

"It's just that the sheriff might call," she explained.

"I know," I said. "Look, it's okay."

She nodded. "I'll try not to be gone too long."

After she and Skipper left, I marched up the stairs and into the living room. Perky Patty stood frozen in the same pose she'd assumed the night before.

"Listen, Patty, you got me in a lot of trouble last night," I said. "Why did you shut up just when I needed your help the most?"

She stared straight ahead, saying nothing. Well, I *had* threatened to rip off her wig. Maybe she was sulking about that.

"When you're ready to talk, just let me know," I said.

I walked on down to her room and opened her closet. Taking out the pink dress, I held it before me once more while looking the mirror. We did look alike, there was no denying it. Acting on a sudden impulse, I pulled off my tee shirt and shorts. Unzipping the dress, I slipped it over my head. The silky material felt cool against my skin. After a brief struggle, I managed to zip up the back. I combed my fingers through my short curls and looked again in the mirror.

"Hello, Patty," I said.

No answer. The green eyes that stared back at me were my own, filled with appraisal as I continued examining the resemblance to Patty. Beginning to feel self-conscious, I stuck out my tongue at the reflection, then twirled like a ballerina into the middle of the room, ballooning the ruffles out around my body while humming the opening bars from "Swans on the Lake."

"*My* song," said a voice from the doorway.

I stumbled to a stop and turned toward Perky Patty. Even though I wasn't really afraid of her anymore, her sudden appearance sent a shockwave crashing through my body.

"You scared me," I said accusingly. "Don't sneak up on me like that."

Her stiff doll's face kept its slight smile, showing no remorse.

"Play my song," she repeated.

I planted my hands on my hips and demanded, "What song? Tell me its name."

"My song."

"I don't know your song."

"Picture," she said.

I swiveled my head, looking at the posters on the wall. "Which picture?"

"My picture."

"The only picture of you I've seen—" I began, and then stopped as she nodded her head stiffly up and down.

"My picture," she said. "My song."

"The portrait," I said slowly. "You're telling me there's a clue in your portrait."

"Picture. My song. Walk with me."

She turned and headed away without looking back to see if I was following, just as she had done the night before. I hurried after and soon we stood together before the painting in the front hallway.

"My song," she said lifting one arm to point at the picture.

Even though I'd looked at that portrait several times since we'd arrived, I'd always studied the face, the clothes, the necklace, without paying much attention to the background. Now I peered more closely at the picture as a whole. The artist had painted Patty in a shaft of sunlight, which streamed through a window to one side. Behind her, the room was swallowed up in shadows. Shelves, so dim as to be almost invisible, lined one wall. Several toys sat on those shelves: a doll, a train, a drum, a pair of roller skates. There were books, too, with the titles of old classics, such as *Tom Sawyer, Little Women,* and *The Vel-*

veteen Rabbit. A piece of sheet music hung partway off a shelf, its upper corner caught beneath a book. Notes marched across the page, spelling out a simple tune. I stepped forward and peered at the tune's title.

" 'Patty's Song,' " I read aloud. Chills danced up and down my arms.

"Play my song," demanded Patty.

I studied the notes, trying to pick out the tune in my head, but it was useless.

"I'll have to take the portrait down and carry it to the living room," I told her.

She nodded. "Take my picture."

I hurried into the den, grabbed a straight chair, and dragged it back into the hallway. I climbed up and struggled to lift the heavy painting from the wall, teetering for a moment as I almost lost my balance. When I got the picture free from its hook at last, the weight proved to be too much for me. The painting slid down the wall, dragging me along. The chair tilted and slipped out from under my feet.

"Be careful!" cried Patty.

Fine time to tell me that, I thought as I struck the floor. I lay there for a minute, stunned, and then crawled slowly to my feet.

"Okay, let's go play your song," I said to Patty.

Clutching the frame with both hands, I dragged the painting down the hallway toward the living room.

Chapter 12

Panting with effort and excitement, I edged the painting into the living room and propped it against the wall near the organ. Patty moved to stand near me.

"Play my song," she said.

"Did you write the song?" I asked, as I climbed onto the organ bench.

She shook her head. "Papa."

"Uncle Jake wrote the song for you?" I asked.

She nodded. "I like my song."

A picture came into my mind of Patty and Uncle Jake, long ago, sitting at this organ and playing this song. In that scene they looked happy.

"He must be really nice," I said.

She nodded. "I like my papa."

"Will this help get him back?"

She pointed at the organ. "Play."

I turned on the switch and felt a slight vibration through the bench as the organ began to hum. Leaning to one side, I squinted at the music in the painting, trying to make out the notes.

First note, Middle C. Well, that was easy enough. I sat back and placed my hand on the

lower keyboard, looking for the two black keys and then hitting the white key just to the left. The tone wavered into the air. I held it while leaning over to count the spaces and lines to the second note. It was a G. I glanced back at the keyboard and tried to hit G, but accidentally hit F instead.

"Stop! Be careful!" cried Patty.

I took my finger off the F and moved it to the G. Then an E. Another G. Then several fast notes in a row. That was hard, and I fumbled around, hitting several wrong notes. I was glad to get to a slower part that finally came to rest again on C.

"Now what?" I asked Patty.

I think I'd expected Uncle Jake to appear in a puff of smoke.

Patty lifted her arm and pointed at the keyboard. "Play my song. *Be careful!*"

"You mean I have to play it exactly right?"

She nodded.

I took a deep breath and started again, trying to be careful; but in the fast part I hit another wrong note.

"Stop!" cried Patty. "Be careful."

I lifted my hands from the keyboard and took a deep breath while flexing my fingers.

"I don't know whether I can get all the way through it without making a mistake or not," I said, wishing I'd paid more attention during my piano lessons the summer before.

Patty swung one foot forward and kicked the bench. "Play!" she commanded.

This time I studied the music for a long mo-

ment, trying to fix the melody in my mind before beginning. A couple of times I hesitated over a note, but managed each time to hit the right one. By the time I finished the piece, I was breathing fast from the strain. The last tone wavered into the air and died away. There came a soft whirring sound from one side of the organ. I jumped from the bench and saw a long slim drawer slide open, a drawer that had been concealed by all those carved scrolls.

"Papa play hide-and-seek," said Patty.

Jewels flashed like fire before my eyes. *Rubies.* My ears roared. My pulse pounded. With trembling fingers I reached into the drawer and lifted out the cool, heavy necklace.

"You find!" Patty shouted.

"Wow!" I held out the necklace, watching it sparkle in the light. "Patty, it's beautiful!"

She pointed at the drawer. "Papa," she said proudly.

"He made the drawer?" I asked.

She nodded. "Hide-and-seek. Play a song."

"Oh, I get it!" I said. "He made the secret drawer and fixed it so the song would work like a key to open it."

"My song," she said.

"Yes, your song. Patty, where *is* Uncle Jake?"

She rocked back and forth from one foot to the other, obviously agitated. "Bird. Naughty bird take my papa."

"What bird? What are you talking about?"

"Naughty bird hide my papa!"

In my mind I saw a parrot flying off with a

man grasped in its claws. I knew such a thing couldn't be. Nevertheless, I asked, "Billy Bob? Is he the naughty bird?"

A crashing sound came from the basement. Billy Bob let out a screech.

"Help me, help me!" he squawked.

"Naughty bird!" Patty cried, her voice filled with fright. "Hide!"

She backed up against a chair and froze, once more becoming a stiff lifeless doll.

My heart hammered against my ribs. Was Billy Bob like the vampire bat I'd once seen in a horror movie? Did he change into a monster and hurt people?

I looked frantically all around as footsteps started up the stairs. Where could I go, what could I do? The footsteps reached the kitchen and headed into the dining room.

Whoever or whatever it was, I was about to meet it face-to-face. I quickly slipped the necklace on over my head, then backed up against the wall beside the organ and froze, trying to look as much like Perky Patty as possible. I held my breath, hoping the pounding of my heart would not betray me.

The footsteps reached the doorway into the living room and paused. I slid my eyes sideways. At first I saw only a shadowy shape from the corner of my eye. Then the shape moved, advancing into the room, and I clamped my teeth together to keep from screaming.

The person creeping toward me was Fenton Hawk.

Chapter 13

Bird. Hawk. Fenton Hawk. That's what Patty had meant when she'd said, "Naughty bird."

Fenton paused and looked all around the room, searching it with his eyes.

"It's got to be here somewhere," he muttered.

He walked over to a couch and swept the dolls to the floor. He pulled a hunting knife from his belt and slashed at the upholstery. One of the plump cushions split open with the crisp sound of a ripe watermelon. Fenton flung down the knife and began tearing out the stuffing with both hands. When he found nothing in that cushion, he split the next, and the next. He didn't stop until he had completely demolished the couch. He then moved on to the chair near Perky Patty and tore that apart, too. Cotton fluff flew threw the air like snow. A piece of fluff landed on the end of my nose. My nostrils began to itch.

Don't sneeze! I warned myself, trying to keep my nose from quivering.

"All right, old man, where did you hide that necklace?" Fenton muttered.

I slid my gaze toward Perky Patty. She stood

as still as a store mannequin, her eyes fixed on me in a lifeless stare. Had the spirit of Patty gone away? Was I alone with Fenton Hawk?

Patty, come back! I screamed inside my head. *Don't leave me!*

With a muttered curse, Fenton moved over to the fireplace. He ran his hands over the bricks, pushing and tugging.

Looking for a loose brick, I thought. Looking for a secret hiding place.

I glanced sideways toward the organ where the drawer stood open. Fenton hadn't seen the drawer yet because the ruffles on my skirt flared out far enough to partially conceal it. Soon, however, he would work his way around to my side of the room. When he saw the empty drawer, would he put two and two together?

Muscles all over my body began to tremble from the strain of trying to stand still. A trickle of perspiration edged out from beneath my hair and slid down my forehead. If Fenton noticed that, he'd realize I wasn't a doll. When his back was turned, I quickly wiped my hand across my forehead, then froze again as he swiveled about on one heel. A wave of fear broke through me when I realized I was no longer in the same pose.

"It's here. I know it's here," Fenton growled.

His gaze passed over me, then swiftly returned. His brows drew together in a frown.

"What the . . ." he muttered.

He took a step closer, looking me straight in the face. My eyes burned as I fought to keep from

blinking. After a moment he shook his head as though disgusted with himself.

"Naw," he whispered. "Can't be. But she sure does look real."

My chest ached with the need to breathe. When he turned away again, I sucked in a lungful of air, hissing like a leaky balloon. Fortunately, Billy Bob chose that moment to set up another racket down in the basement.

"*Awk!* Help me!" he screeched.

Fenton snorted in disgust. "Stupid bird."

"Help me!" squawked Billy Bob again. "Hidden treasure. Play a song."

Fenton's eyes narrowed. He peered toward the organ, which was still on, its red light glowing, its motor purring softly like a contented cat.

"Play a song," hollered Billy Bob.

Fenton crossed to the organ in three big strides. I flinched. I couldn't help it. The fuzz slid off the end of my nose and landed on my upper lip. I inhaled sharply, trying to stop the sneeze. The tickling traveled down my nostrils and into my lungs.

"Achoo!"

Fenton whirled toward me, his eyes bugging. My nose twitched again.

"Achoo!"

I snapped my eyes open to find Fenton staring fixedly at the necklace against my chest. He flicked his glance back toward my face.

"You're not a doll, you're that girl!" he cried. "And you found the necklace!"

He lunged for me, both hands outstretched. I

jumped away as his fingers grazed my shoulders. Shrugging him off, I leapt forward and vaulted over the back of the destroyed couch.

"I'll get you!" he yelled, scrambling over the couch after me. "Give me that necklace!"

I dashed forward, dodging chairs and tables. He pounded after me and grabbed my arm, whirling me around.

"Let go of me!" I shouted.

I kicked him hard in the shin. He tightened his grip on my arm.

"You little demon," he snarled.

He grabbed the necklace and pulled, trying to break the clasp. My head jerked forward as the chain bit into my neck.

"Stop that!" I yelled, kicking him again while beating at his chest with my fist.

"I want that necklace."

He grabbed it again and tried to pull it over the top of my head, but the stones tangled in my hair. He jerked the necklace back down around my throat, ripping loose several strands of my hair.

"Ouch!" I cried.

"Stop!" shouted a voice behind us. I whipped my head around and saw Perky Patty lurching toward us like Frankenstein's monster, her arms extended, her legs swinging in stiff strides.

"Naughty bird!" she yelled.

Fenton's eyes bugged out and his mouth fell open.

"Argh!" he gagged. Dropping my arm, he took a step backward.

"Stop, bird!" cried Patty. Her green eyes blazed. She staggered forward, reaching for him.

"Don't touch me!" Fenton screamed, continuing to back away. He tripped over a large baby doll.

"Mama!" it cried.

Fenton flailed his arms. He toppled backward, striking his head against the edge of a table. He slid limply to the floor and lay there with his eyes closed.

Patty looked at him and then at me. "Bird stop," she said.

I rolled Fenton onto his side. Whipping the sash from around my waist, I bound his wrists tightly behind his back. Then I took Patty's sash and tied his ankles together, adding one tight knot after another. His face looked pale underneath his dark beard.

"Do you think he's okay?" I asked anxiously. I was glad he was unconscious, but I didn't want him to die.

Patty nodded. She pointed to his belt and then at a heavy chair. "Take."

I tugged the belt from around Fenton's waist. Laying the chair down on the floor behind him, I buckled his bound arms to one of the rungs.

"That should hold him," I said, jumping to my feet.

Patty pointed toward the door. "Find my papa!"

I dashed through the house, out the kitchen door, and down the back steps.

"Hang on, Uncle Jake, I'm coming!" I shouted as I headed for Dead Man's Canyon.

Chapter 14

The heavy necklace swung back and forth, banging against my chest as I scrambled down the rocks to the floor of the canyon and up the other side. Just as I reached the top of the bluff, my skirt caught on a branch protruding from a dead piñon tree. I jerked the skirt away, leaving a piece of pink material fluttering like a flag from the branch.

"Hurry, hurry," I muttered.

I pushed forward through the bushes. The wind flung my hair across my eyes, temporarily blinding me. I brushed my hair aside and peered through the trees. The cabin lay about a hundred yards ahead. *Thump* went the broken shutter, banging against the cabin wall. And behind me. Was that a rock crashing down the bluff? Had Fenton gotten loose? Was he coming after me?

"Don't look back," I told myself. "Just keep going."

As I ran, the bushes whipped against my legs while tree branches, reaching like witches' claws, scratched my hands and arms. When I reached the cabin, I saw that Fenton had taken his truck.

"Uncle Jake?" I shouted.

In answer came several yelps from inside the shed and then a clattering sound. I slid to a stop, breathing hard. Did Fenton really have a dog in there? What if I broke open that door and the dog attacked me?

"Uncle Jake, is that you?"

The yelps changed to a string of garbled grunts, but I still couldn't tell whether they were being made by a person or a dog. Then the sounds changed to humming. A tune. *Patty's song!*

My heart cartwheeled in my chest. Only Uncle Jake would hum that song.

"Uncle Jake, it's Carole! I've come to get you out!"

I jumped forward and tugged at the padlock on the door. It held tight, resisting all my efforts. Could I break it loose? Searching the ground nearby, I found a large rock with a sharp edge. I grabbed it up and dashed back to attack the padlock, using the rock like a hammer to pound at the screws in the wood. The blows jarred my arms and shoulders. My hands stung as they scraped against the door frame. I licked a bleeding knuckle and then pounded at the lock again. The wood around the lock splintered with a tearing sound. I wrenched the lock away and flung open the door. After the bright sunlight, the inside of the shed seemed as dark as night. I blinked, peering through the shadows.

"Uncle Jake?"

"Um unh um."

He lay on the floor near the back of the shed,

a thin white-haired man with his arms and legs tightly bound, his mouth gagged by a large gray rag. On the floor near his feet lay a tipped-over workbench, surrounded by a clutter of pliers, hammers, screwdrivers, and paint cans. I leapt forward through the mess and knelt beside him to loosen the gag. When I'd gotten it off at last, I asked, "Uncle Jake, are you all right?"

His lips looked swollen and bruised, and his eyes seemed dazed.

"Pa-Patty?"

"No, it's Carole."

He peered at me closely, searching my face. "But—" He paused, and I watched sadness flicker through his eyes. "Oh. For a moment I thought you were . . ."

When he stopped again, I finished it for him. "You thought I was Patty."

"You look—you look so much like her."

I nodded. "Come on, we've got to get you out of here."

I tugged on the rope that bound his hands, but it had drawn so tight that my fingers couldn't loosen it. I snatched up a screwdriver and dug at the knots. The screwdriver slipped and scraped across the back of one of Uncle Jake's hands. Blood oozed from the wound.

At last the knots parted and the rope fell away. With a groan Uncle Jake sat up and began rubbing his swollen wrists while I freed his feet.

"Can you stand?" I asked.

"If you'll help me," he said. "My feet are swollen, too."

"Okay. We'd better hurry."

I grabbed his arms and dragged him to his feet. He held onto my shoulders, breathing hard while peering anxiously toward the door.

"Where's Fenton?"

"He's out cold on the floor of your living room," I said. "Patty and I tied him up."

His fingers convulsed, digging into my shoulder. "What do you mean, you and Patty tied him up?"

I gulped. I'd referred to Patty without even thinking.

"She's—Uncle Jake, no one believes me, but Patty . . . well, she's been talking to me. Through the doll."

His face grew pale beneath his stubbled beard. "Patty's been talking to you?"

"She asked me to help her," I hurried on, "because she was so worried about you."

"How did she—?"

"I don't know how. But she came. And she told me you needed help. And—"

His eyes filled with tears. "I wish I could believe—"

"Look," I interrupted, pointing to the necklace. "I found this in the secret drawer. I found it by playing 'Patty's Song.' "

He stared at the necklace, his face drawn in a puzzled frown. "No one else knew about that secret drawer and that song. No one but—"

"No one but you . . . and Patty," I said, looking him straight in the eye.

He took a deep breath. Then he slowly nodded.

"Sometimes through the years I've thought I felt her with me. As though she might be stopping by now and then just to check on me."

"This time she stopped by and found you in trouble," I said.

His face softened with yearning.

"Do you think she'll wait for me?" he asked. "Will I get to talk with her, too?"

"I don't know. The one thing I do know is that we'd better get out of here before Fenton wakes up and gets loose."

He leaned heavily on my shoulder as I helped him from the shed. Limping along, he squinted as though the light hurt his eyes.

"He came into the house night before last," he said. "Fenton, I mean. Looking for the necklace. I was in my tower office working on an idea for a new video game—"

"Hidden Treasure," I interrupted.

"Did I leave the computer on?" he asked, sounding surprised. Then he nodded. "That's right, I did. I turned out all the other lights and climbed upstairs to lie down on my cot for a few minutes to rest. I must have fallen asleep because the next thing I knew, I heard noises down in the office. I rushed down and found Fenton with a flashlight going through all my drawers. We had a fight. I—well, I'm not as young as I used to be. I guess you know the rest."

"Did you hear us outside the shed yesterday?" I asked.

"Yes, but I couldn't make you understand it

wasn't a dog," he replied. "Today I thought to hum."

" 'Patty's Song.' " I stopped and clutched his arm. "Listen. An engine. Someone's coming up the hill."

Fenton's truck. It had to be. He'd gotten loose and was coming after us.

"Hide!" I cried, dragging Uncle Jake toward a bush.

"Uncle Jake!" Skipper's voice shrilled up the hill above the sound of the engine.

I stumbled to a stop and glanced over my shoulder as our old car roared into sight with Mom at the wheel and Skipper hanging out the window.

"Carole!" shouted Mom.

I threw my arms around Uncle Jake, hugging him tight. "It's Mom and Skipper! We're safe!"

Chapter 15

Sheriff Sanchez was waiting for us in the living room when we got back to the house. Near him sat Fenton with his hands cuffed behind his back. Mom quickly informed me that she had called the sheriff's office as soon as she'd found Fenton tied up on the floor.

When I advanced into the room, Fenton cowered away. "Don't let her touch me!" he shrieked. "Keep her away from me!"

"So that's it," Sanchez said, looking back and forth between Perky Patty and me. "Fenton keeps saying the doll knocked him down, but it was you. Same dress, same features. You look just alike."

I stepped forward and examined Perky Patty closely. She was just a doll again, stiff and still, her eyes vacant. I glanced toward Uncle Jake and shook my head. Disappointment dragged at the lines around his mouth. He sighed and turned to Sanchez.

"Fenton's your thief," he said. "You'll find the missing jewelry in a metal box buried in the side of Dead Man's Canyon."

"That blasted ruby necklace," Fenton growled. "If I hadn't hung around to look for it, I'd be safe in Mexico by now."

"I've already read you your rights," Sanchez said to Fenton, "but you'd better not say any more until your lawyer is present. Come along, now, we're going to the station."

Later, with Fenton safely in jail, Mom and Skipper and I gathered in the basement with Uncle Jake, Mrs. Parker, and Tim for a celebration.

"This tastes good," Uncle Jake said, sipping a glass of iced tea. "Fenton did give me water, but that shed sure got hot in the middle of the day. I didn't think I'd ever feel cool again."

Skipper jumped out of the beanbag chair and moved to stand before Billy Bob's cage.

"Say 'cool,' Billy bob. Say 'cool.' "

Billy Bob glared.

"Carole, when you broke open the shed door and that cool breeze poured in . . ." Uncle Jake paused, shaking his head at the memory.

"Say 'cool,' Billy Bob," begged Skipper.

Billy Bob glared.

"Anyway, that was a happy moment," Uncle Jake went on. "And another happy moment was when I saw you driving up the hill," he said, turning to Mom.

"It was the note that told me where to look," Mom answered. "Carole, it was clever of you to leave that note."

I straightened in my chair and stared at her. "What note?"

"The one you left on the floor near Fenton,"

Mom replied. "The one with the map and the arrows pointing to Fenton's place."

"But I didn't—" I began.

Mom plunged on. "I remembered what you'd said yesterday about Fenton's shed, how you thought Uncle Jake was tied up in there. What I didn't understand was the rest of the stuff in the note."

"What stuff?" I asked.

"It sounded like code. I could see you were in a hurry when you wrote it, because the printing was so shaky."

"What did it say?"

"You quoted the doll, don't you remember?" She took the crumpled note from her pocket. Unfolding it, she read, " 'Papa, I'm Patty. Seek. You will find me.' "

I glanced toward Uncle Jake. His face shone with wonder, as though a light had switched on under the skin. He took the note from Mom and looked at it for a long moment. Then he turned toward me and we both smiled.

"Carole, that is a strange note, but it worked," said Mrs. Parker. "Jacob, we're mighty glad to have you back safe and sound."

"We sure are." Tim glanced toward me, and I saw admiration in his eyes and maybe a little envy. "Just wish I'd been here when Fenton showed up today! But—well, you did okay by yourself, figuring out that song, finding the necklace, capturing Fenton single-handed."

Again Uncle Jake and I looked at each other. Maybe someday I'd tell the rest of them what had

really happened. But now—well, now I was just glad that Uncle Jake knew and understood.

I rose and wheeled slowly in the center of the room, taking in the scene around me: Skipper and Billy Bob exchanging glares; Tim with his wheat straw hair falling down over his eyes; Mrs. Parker contentedly munching cookies; Uncle Jake, who had faced so much sorrow in his life, smiling at me from across the room. And Mom. She'd faced a lot of sorrow, too. The divorce, the sale of the house, the move—those had to have been hard for her, but she'd handled the changes bravely and was getting on with her life.

Sunlight, slanting in through the patio doors, misted everything in a golden haze.

I sighed. "It's good to be home."

Mrs. Parker grinned at me and winked.

"Cool!" said Billy Bob.

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ALONE WITH PATTY

One room in the old house was filled with dolls. It gave me a creepy feeling—all those eyes staring. Then I saw her in the hallway and my breath froze in my throat. *Patty*. The girl in the portrait. The one who looked just like me. I couldn't move. I couldn't yell. I just stood there, stuck to the floor, with my heart hammering in my chest. Patty didn't move either. She stared straight ahead, her hands held stiffly in front of her.

Slowly, I moved forward a little and touched her hand. It was cold and slick. Plastic.

A DOLL?

Boy, had she scared me. I laughed with relief.

But just then Patty turned her head and looked me straight in the eyes.

"HELP ME," she whispered. **"HELP ME..."**

AVON CAMELOT
PUBLISHED BY AVON BOOKS
008-012
RL: 5.5

ISBN 0-380-76569-1
76569

Manitouwadge
3 3913 00015023 0
Harrah, Madge/No escape
JF HAR C.1 E-PB 1993

W6-BZJ-821